Soviet State Security Services 1917–46

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ILLUSTRATED BY JOHNNY SHUMATE

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Series editors Martin Windrow & Nick Reynolds

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SOVIET STATE SECURITY SERVICES 1917–91

FORERUNNERS

The state security apparatus of the Tsarist regime had developed over more than a century prior to the tumultuous events of 1917. During that time the perceived threats to the Tsar's government evolved and diversified, from the reform-minded Decembrists of 1825 to the formidable blend of agrarian socialism and left-wing terrorism espoused by Narodnaya Volya ('The People's Will') in the 1870s and 1880s. In part this was a consequence of the territorial expansion of the Russian Empire, which by 1881 encompassed a wide variety of peoples, languages, religions and cultures. The Tsarist regime's determination to implement a policy of 'Russification' prompted many to resist such efforts, making the job of anticipating and countering subversive activity increasingly difficult. The challenges faced by the Tsar's security forces in many ways prefigured those that confronted the leaders of the USSR from 1917 onwards, and the measures employed before the October Revolution of 24–25 October 1917 OS (6–7 November 1917 NS) informed and influenced those enacted by the Soviet regime as it sought to anticipate and defeat threats to its existence.

Russian state security under the Romanovs

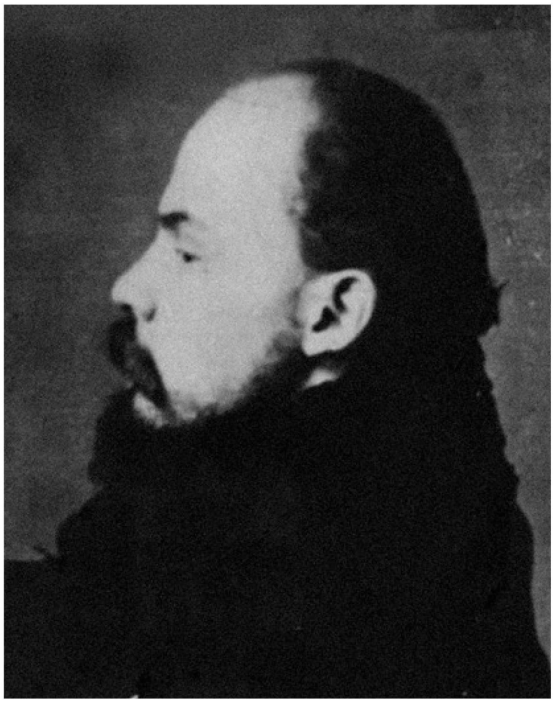
Established by Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801–25) in 1802, the MVD (*Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del*; 'Ministry of the Interior') initially had a very broad remit, but came to focus primarily on aspects of state security. Local policing varied greatly in its effectiveness and heavy-handedness; the *uryadniki* (mounted rural policemen) were especially feared, while *dvorniki* (wardens) undertook local police surveillance in towns across the Russian Empire.

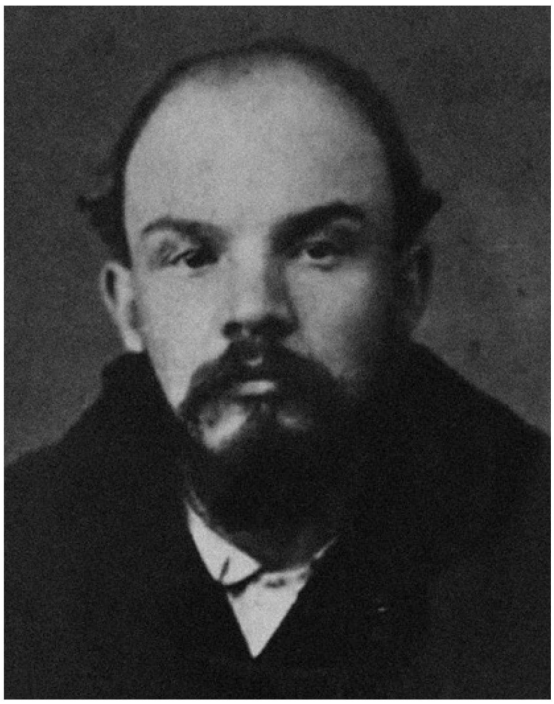
Tsar Alexander II on his deathbed. His assassination proved momentous in the evolution of Imperial Russia's state security organizations. Members of Narodnaya Volya threw two bombs at the Tsar's carriage as he returned to the Winter Palace, the second of which – thrown by Ignacy Hryniewiecki – fatally injured the Tsar. Only a few months earlier, the state security apparatus had undergone a major reorganization. (Photo12/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

Founded in 1826, the Third Section of the Imperial Chancellery (*Tretiye Otdeleniye*), serving as the regime's secret police, monitored the activities of religious minorities, financial criminals, political opponents of the Tsar's government and foreign visitors to the Russian Empire; it was also responsible for supervising prisons in which 'state prisoners' were held. In its role as Russia's 'moral guardian', the Third Section sought to influence public opinion, both inside and beyond the Russian Empire. As well as working with the Ministry of Education to identify and suppress authors who criticized the Tsar's government, the Third Section also rewarded authors who presented the regime in a positive light. The Third Section was disbanded less than a year before the assassination of Tsar Alexander II (r. 1855–81) on 1 March 1881 OS (13 March 1881 NS), in response to an investigation that uncovered widespread inefficiency and incompetence in the face of the growing threat posed to the Tsar's regime by revolutionary and terrorist movements.

Reporting to the MVD, the Police Department (*Departament politsii Rossiyskoy imperii*) was established in August 1880. Aided by the Special Corps of Gendarmes (*Otdel'nyy korpus zhandarmov*) – the Imperial Russian Army's uniformed security police, tasked with the pursuit of

fugitives and the implementation of crowd-control measures, with investigative powers added in 1871 – the Police Department was responsible for all policing organizations and fire services.





Two photographs of Lenin from his Okhrana file, 1895. (Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

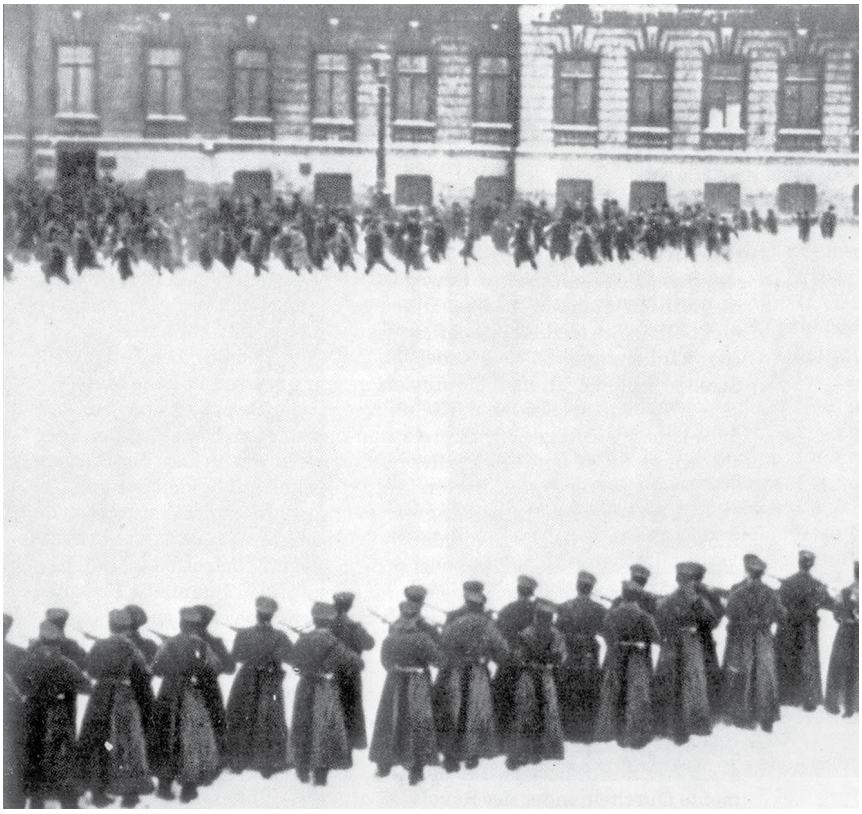
The assassination of Tsar Alexander II prompted a new bout of reorganization. Established in 1881 to counter political terrorism and left-wing revolutionary activity within and beyond the Russian Empire, the Okhrana ('Guard') became notorious for its use of covert operations, undercover agents and 'perlustration' (the reading of private correspondence). In particular, the organization was associated with the use of *agents provocateurs* and the infiltration of suspect groups. The Okhrana's St Petersburg chief, Georgy Porfiryevich Sudeykin, recruited Sergey Petrovich Degayev, a prominent member of Narodnaya Volya, as a double agent; after he contributed to the arrest of the latter organization's leader, Vera Nikolayevna Figner, on 28 January 1883 OS (10 February 1883 NS), Degayev became the de facto leader of what remained of the group, and sought to transform it from an anti-government to an ultra-nationalist organization with strongly anti-Semitic tendencies. After he was exposed by his fellow revolutionaries in October 1883, Degayev agreed to assassinate Sudeykin before fleeing to the United States, where he became a respected academic. During this bizarre episode both Degayev and Sudeykin exhibited behaviours suggesting that the two men were similarly scornful of the Tsarist government's efforts to limit the power of the Okhrana, and the line between state security organizations and the groups they were intended to defeat became ever more blurred.

The Okhrana continued its efforts to infiltrate and defeat dissidents following the accession of Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917) on 20 October 1894 OS (1 November 1894 NS). The new Tsar became known as 'Nicholas the bloody' after over 1,000 people were trampled to death at Khodynka Field near Moscow, where a banquet was held on 18 May 1896 OS (30 May 1896 NS) for the people in honour of his coronation. This episode occurred because of failure to anticipate the large numbers of people attending and the incompetence of the civil authorities responsible for maintaining order. Senior figures in the Tsar's government also became targets for assassination, among them Dmitry Sergeyevich Sipyagin and Vyacheslav Konstantinovich von Plehve, heads of the MVD in 1899–1902 and 1902–04 respectively. Both men were assassinated by members of the

Socialist Revolutionary Party, Sipyagin by Stephan Valerianovich Balmashov and Plehve by Igor Sazonov.

The 1905 Revolution and its aftermath

Arising in the shadow of military defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), the 1905 Revolution was an organic grassroots multicentric rebellion characterized by mutinies in the military, peasant revolts involving seizures of land and property with violence against landlords in the countryside, widespread strikes by the urban proletariat, and by dissent among intellectuals disenchanted by their lack of basic civil rights. Added to this was strife among ethnic, national and religious groups angered by the suppression of their languages and culture and lack of local autonomy.



The cleric and political activist Georgy Apollonovich Gapon organized a mass demonstration of labourers that ended with at least 92 shot dead and hundreds wounded among the unarmed demonstrators on ‘Bloody Sunday’, 9 January 1905 OS (22 January 1905 NS), as they sought to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II in St Petersburg. The widespread loss of life at the hands of Imperial Russian Army troops sparked outrage and strike activity across the Russian Empire. Violent repression of the leaders of the rebellion, with thousands of deaths during the 1905 Revolution and as many as 14,000 executions by early 1906, left a legacy of bitterness and an escalating cycle of political violence and

assassinations in the years leading up to World War I. (Photo by Universal History Archive/Getty Images)

In August 1906, one of no fewer than 11 attempts was mounted by dissidents seeking to assassinate Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin. In April 1906, Stolypin had become head of the MVD and was appointed Prime Minister of Russia that July. The anarchist revolutionary Dmitry Grigoryevich Bogrov, an Okhrana double agent, assassinated Stolypin on 5 September 1911 OS (18 September 1911 NS); some have alleged that Bogrov was instructed to kill Stolypin by right-wing members of the Okhrana as they opposed Stolypin's agrarian reforms. (Keystone/Getty Images)

The Socialist Revolutionary Party, agrarian socialists and ideological heirs of the Narodniki ('Populists'), were prominent among the Okhrana's targets for infiltration in the years before 1917. Yevno Fishelevich Azef, a prominent member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, was a long-term double agent and *agent provocateur* working for the Okhrana; after being unmasked by Vladimir L'vovich Butsev in 1908, Azef fled to Germany. The Socialist Revolutionary Party would split in the summer of 1917 as some of its members opted to enter coalitions with liberal and social-democratic parties while others gravitated towards the Bolsheviks' hard-line stance.

Similarly, the Bolsheviks, a breakaway revolutionary Marxist group founded by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov – Lenin – and Alexander Aleksandrovich Bogdanov in 1903, were also compromised by the presence of double agents working for the Okhrana. The Bolshevik Jacob Zhitomirsky was recruited by the Okhrana in Berlin in 1902; after being expelled from Germany he moved in the same circles as Lenin in Paris during 1908–12. Within the Russian Empire, the senior Bolshevik Roman Vatslavovich Malinovsky, aka *Portnoi* ('the Tailor'), was a double agent working for the Okhrana whose activities led to the arrest and imprisonment of Sergo Konstantinovich Ordzhonikidze, Yakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov and Josef Vissarionovich Stalin in 1912–13. The Bolsheviks who seized power in Russia in 1917 had seen close colleagues unmasked as Okhrana agents and well understood the value of covert security operations.

In the wake of the 1905 Revolution the Russian security services stepped up their counter-revolutionary efforts throughout the countryside. Here, a local police chief (right) and his men round up suspected revolutionaries among the peasantry. (ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

World War I and the revolutions of 1917

World War I laid bare the bankruptcy of the Tsarist regime. By late 1916, Tsar Nicholas II enjoyed no support from any societal group, and the institutions of his government had lost all popular legitimacy; the Russian Empire progressively fell into chaos. What began as food strikes and demonstrations in Petrograd by industrial workers and women on 23 February 1917 OS (3 March 1917 NS) spread rapidly throughout the city.

While there was fighting and bloodshed, what was different in 1917 compared to 1905 was that the Imperial Russian Army not only refused to fire on the demonstrators, but actually joined them. Within five days, Tsar Nicholas II had abdicated and a Provisional Government made up of bourgeois liberals (Cadets), Mensheviks and a smattering of others was formed.

This cartoon from the Russian satirical journal *Burelom* (Deadfall) depicts the Okhrana seal in which the heads of the imperial double-headed eagle have been replaced with the heads of Tsar Nicholas II and Sergei Sergeyevich Savich, the Chief of Gendarmes, with text reading 'Seal of the department of provocation; do not spare your ammunition!'. (JHU Sheridan Libraries/Gado/Getty Images)

At the same time, however, another de facto government, the Petrograd Soviet ('Council') of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, came into existence. With their origins in similar bodies that arose in 1905, the Soviets were bodies of delegates directly elected by workers and soldiers but with an uneasy power-sharing arrangement with the Provisional Government. Among the revolutionaries only Lenin, still in exile in Switzerland, adamantly refused to support Soviet cooperation with the Provisional Government, believing his party to be the revolutionary vanguard, and thus the only party qualified to rule in the name of the proletariat.

The Bolsheviks' slogans were designed to imply that they supported socialist democracy, but in reality Lenin believed in the one-party state and making use of civil war and mass terror to achieve his aims. His idea of democracy was called Democratic Centralism – meaning there could be a healthy debate about policy only at the highest levels of the Bolshevik Party (the Centre), after which all cadres would fall in line to execute policy. From the beginning, Lenin had no intention of sharing power with anyone, and the Constituent Assembly when it finally convened was forcibly shut

down after meeting for just one day. With hopes for a true multi-party democracy thus dashed, conflict with a multitude of stakeholders was inevitable. In a short time Russia went from abolition of the police and Imperial Russian Army, emptying the jails and an amnesty for political prisoners and criminals under the Provisional Government, to establishment of the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee (PMRC) and its subsequent evolution into the Cheka – the first name for the most ruthlessly efficient and omnipresent secret police the world has ever known.

This picture shows one of the last members of Petrograd's police (tall figure) under arrest in June 1917. As well as denouncing the Provisional Government as bourgeois, Lenin advocated for immediate withdrawal from World War I, repudiation of Russia's war debt, establishment of a non-parliamentary socialist government, and abolition of the police, the Imperial Russian Army and the existing bureaucracy. He also called for nationalization of 'all lands' and confiscation of landed estates. These positions seemed extreme at the time, but as the Provisional Government continued the war effort with ongoing mass casualties and failed to improve workers' conditions, reduce the hours in the workday or supply adequate food, fuel or other vital commodities, the initial support for it diminished rapidly. (Bettmann/Getty Images)

THE CHEKA

Following an abortive attempt to seize power in July 1917, the Bolshevik Party was outlawed and Lenin was forced to flee to Finland to avoid arrest. In August that year, an attempted right-wing counter-revolutionary coup (the Kornilov Affair) resulted in the prime minister of the Provisional Government, Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky, enlisting support from and distributing arms to the Bolsheviks and railway workers who prevented Kornilov's entry into Petrograd. As discontent with the government spread, support for the now-armed Bolsheviks in the Soviets increased, and they finally achieved a majority in the Petrograd Soviet in September, with Leon Trotsky (Lev Davidovich Bronstein) elected as leader. Kerensky then attempted to draw the teeth of the support for the Bolsheviks by transferring Petrograd garrison units suspected to be politically unreliable to the front. In response, the Bolsheviks established the PMRC on 16 October 1917 OS (29 October 1917 NS).

The PMRC played a vital role in the seizure and early consolidation of power, and can be considered to be the predecessor of the Cheka. Crucially, Petrograd's garrison agreed to take orders from the PMRC, which as a result controlled the arsenals including the artillery of the Peter and Paul Fortress. The membership of the PMRC included many prominent Bolsheviks, some Socialist Revolutionaries and a few Anarchists. At Lenin's insistence, it planned the Bolshevik seizure of power to precede the Second Congress of Soviets, scheduled to take place on 25–27 October 1917 OS (7–9 November 1917 NS). Although Lenin seized power in the name of the Soviets, the Soviets were controlled by the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks and most of the Socialist Revolutionaries in the Congress were presented with a *fait accompli* of a Bolshevik-controlled government and walked out in protest, leaving the Bolsheviks in sole power supported by just a few breakaway Left Socialist Revolutionaries.

From the PMRC to the Cheka

In the PMRC, Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky handled security matters; it was he who first called it the 'Iron Fist of the Proletariat', a name that was later applied to the Cheka itself. The PMRC answered only to the Bolshevik Central Executive Committee – as would be true of the Cheka – and many

of the powers and repressive techniques of the Cheka had their origins with the PMRC. Having used sleight of hand to seize power and facing opposition from virtually the entire political spectrum, the Bolsheviks felt under siege immediately and had no easy option to ameliorate the collapse of the economy and civil order. It was immediately clear that the utopian ideal of the revolutionary masses policing themselves and spontaneously administering revolutionary justice without a repressive bureaucracy was impractical. To maintain power, repression of opposition would be necessary.

On 26 October 1917 OS (8 November 1917 NS), literally one day after the seizure of power, the PMRC introduced censorship of the press, closing all non-Bolshevik newspapers, and began the requisitioning of housing and vehicles. Additional revolutionary notions – 'Enemies of the People' and 'Sabotage and Wrecking' – were introduced just five days later when a proclamation of the PMRC accused 'high ranking functionaries in state administration, banks, the treasury, the railways and the post and telegraph office' of sabotage against the new government and declaring them to be Enemies of the People. This was formalized by Lenin himself on 28 November 1917 OS (11 December 1917 NS) when he declared leaders of the opposition party, the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets), to be Enemies of the People who were to be 'arrested immediately and brought before a revolutionary court'. In April 1918 it was the turn of the Anarchists; the Left Socialist Revolutionaries were repressed after an attempted rebellion in July 1918 and the Mensheviks were repressed in 1921.

An extremely rare original Cheka black leather visor cap. These were not standard issue, but were very popular with ranking members of the early state security service. Often the higher-ranking members would go to former Tsarist tailors to have these privately made. The caps were usually no longer worn by the early 1920s.

Although there was real opposition to the Bolsheviks, political leaders were often arrested and sentenced irrespective of their actual guilt of any crime; they were guilty by virtue of their opinions, what they might do, and often held as hostages, their fate dependent on the actions of others in their party. The concept of collective guilt with hostage-taking and the execution of hostages after any act of opposition was widely practised beginning in 1918 and throughout the Russian Civil War (1917–22). Justice as previously understood – the idea that guilt was judged by an individual's actions and needed to be proved by means of a formalized legal process – was derided as 'bourgeois justice' and gave way to the concept of 'revolutionary justice', the idea of guilt because of the opinions one held or the class to which one belonged. The idea of 'sabotage' or 'wrecking' came to be the standard explanation for any failure of the centrally planned economy, an easy way to deflect blame from failures of the system; it was invoked in grotesque dimensions during the Great Terror of the 1930s.

The *budenovka* was based on a design for a new winter cap for the Imperial Russian Army. While such caps were normally made of cloth, this Frontier Troops example is in black leather. The leather *budenovka* became popular after red examples were used by Leon Trotsky's bodyguard unit.

A close-up of the hammer-and-plough design used by both the Red Army and the Cheka during 1918–22. Being a complicated design, it was quickly replaced by the more familiar hammer and sickle. Higher-ranking members of the Cheka would often go to former jewellers for the wealthy and commission privately made cap badges that were quite intricate in their design.

Lenin was well aware of the necessity of providing food security for the cities and understood that the February Revolution of 23 February–3 March 1917 OS (8–16 March 1917 NS) that deposed Tsar Nicholas II was in large part due to food riots that escalated into full-scale revolution. Accordingly, on 4 November 1917 OS (17 November 1917 NS), a Food Commission was established. In its inaugural proclamation it established a dichotomy between victims (the urban poor) and the exploiting classes, an elastic term which could include the urban bourgeoisie, intellectuals, merchants ('speculators' in Bolshevik terminology) and better-off peasants. The practice of food requisitioning in the countryside by teams of Red Guards, workers and loyal military units began at this time.

After a short time, the governmental functions of the PMRC were assumed by the Sovnarkom (*Soviet narodnykh kommissarov*; 'Council of People's Commissars') and the PMRC was abolished on 5 December 1917 OS (18 December 1917 NS). Its security functions were assumed by the Cheka, established on 7 December 1917 OS (20 December 1917 NS). Formally called the VChK (*Vserossíyskaya Chrezvycháynaya Komíssiya*; 'All-Russian Extraordinary Commission to combat Counterrevolution,

Speculation and Sabotage'), Cheka – or VeCheka as it was sometimes called – was the term used in place of its full title. The term 'Extraordinary' meant that the Cheka was permitted to act without reference to law and without supervision by the NKIu (*Naródnyi Komissariát Iustitsii RSFSR*; 'People's Commissariats of Justice') or NKVD (*Naródnyi Komissariát Vnútrennikh Del*; 'People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs'). There was in fact early ineffectual resistance from the NKIu over jurisdiction but ultimately, the only real oversight was that the Cheka was subordinated to the 'government', which in reality meant directly to Lenin and a small group of his closest associates. By March 1918, the Cheka had fully eclipsed the NKIu. Not only did Lenin not restrict the Cheka's excesses, he often propounded more aggressive revolutionary justice, sometimes demanding executions explicitly. In Lenin's own words: 'The state is an instrument for coercion … we want to organize violence in the name of the interests of the workers.'

The Cheka's growing power and influence

The Cheka's first chief, Felix Dzerzhinsky, was chosen by Lenin specifically because of the long time he had spent in Tsarist prisons. He was thus very familiar with the Okhrana's methods, with extensive first-hand experience of their techniques of interrogation and denunciation, the employment of *agents provocateurs*, and the use of deception and disinformation. The Cheka incorporated much of the Okhrana's expertise and experience. In Dzerzhinsky, Lenin had a willing executive. In Dzerzhinsky's own words: 'We have no concern for justice at this hour! We are at war … and the fight is to the death. What I am proposing, what I am demanding is the creation of a mechanism … [that] will filter out the counter-revolutionaries once and for all!' Dzerzhinsky was a highly motivated and committed ideologue who was personally ascetic, incorruptible and puritanical in his own behaviour. A story is told that he once discarded pancakes made by his sister because she had obtained the flour from a speculator, meaning a private merchant. Though it is unlikely that he would have personally approved of sadism – soon being committed by some of his Chekists – he was willing to be as ruthless as required to defend the Revolution without reference to 'bourgeois morality'.

The Cheka used a small fleet of Austin 3rd Series armoured cars in their campaigns against counter-revolutionaries. The leather uniforms worn by the crews of such vehicles were often of foreign make and there was no set pattern to them. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)

The death penalty had been abolished on 26 October 1917 OS (8 November 1917 NS) – one of the first actions by the Second Congress of Soviets, and one which reportedly infuriated Lenin who used a proclamation of a state of emergency in February 1918 to give the Cheka the right of summary judgement and execution, the death penalty being fully restored on 29 June 1918. The core of the early Cheka included many familiar names from the PMRC and the subsequent NKVD, including Vyacheslav Rudolfovich Menzhinsky and Genrikh Grigoryevich Yagoda, later leaders of the OGPU and NKVD respectively, as well as important lieutenants such as Martin Ivanovich Latsis, Jēkabs Peterss, Józef Unszlicht and Meier Abramovich Trilisser. Included were many non-ethnic Russians with prominent Baltic, Polish and Jewish names, and even some Left Socialist Revolutionaries, but former Tsarist police and Imperial Russian Army officers, aristocrats and bourgeois were excluded from membership – in fact they were most often the target of Cheka repressions.

Left Socialist Revolutionaries' participation in the Cheka ended after an uprising in July 1918 over a dispute concerning the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on 3 March 1918, which secured peace with Germany at the cost of large territorial losses and indemnities demanded by the Germans in exchange for halting their armies in the field. On 6 July 1918 a Socialist

Revolutionary Chekist, Yakov Grigoryevich Blyumkin, assassinated Wilhelm von Mirbach, the German ambassador to Moscow, hoping to force the Bolsheviks back into the war and worse, the Left Socialist Revolutionary operatives actually captured Dzerzhinsky and Latsis as they appeared at Left Socialist Revolutionary Party headquarters to demand that Blyumkin be turned over to the Cheka. Although the Left Socialist Revolutionary revolt collapsed, largely due to ineptitude and a lack of resolution, the lesson was learned – particularly by Stalin – that the Cheka itself was not immune to counter-revolutionary conspiracy. As will be seen later, this led to deadly consequences for the police apparatus (by then known as the NKVD) in the 1930s.

Two basically equipped Cheka guards with their captive, a former Tsarist officer now fighting with the White forces. His eventual fate, though unknown, would not have been pleasant. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)

Pictured here at his desk in Petrograd's Tauride Palace, Moisei Solomonovich Uritsky was the head of the Cheka of the Petrograd Soviet until his assassination at the hands of Leonid Joakimovich Kannegisser, a military cadet, on 17 August 1918. This act, as well as the attempted assassination of Lenin by the Left Socialist Revolutionary dissident Fanny Efimova Kaplan on 30 August 1918, spurred the Soviet regime to introduce the 'Red Terror'. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

After the Left Socialist Revolutionary revolt in July, Moisei Solomonovich Uritsky, the Cheka chief in Petrograd, was assassinated by Leonid Joakimovich Kannegisser, a military cadet, on 17 August, followed by an assassination attempt on Lenin himself on 30 August. Although arrests, hostage-taking and summary executions had been occurring all along, a new and more violent phase, the 'Red Terror', was now initiated by Lenin and carried out by the Cheka.

Expansion and consolidation

Immediately following the October Revolution and throughout the first six months of 1918, the Cheka expanded about 120-fold from its initial employee base of about 100 members; some estimates place membership as high as 280,000 by early 1921. Finding men who were 'tough' as demanded

by Lenin was challenging: some Chekists were hardened criminals, psychopaths and sadists released from prison during the general amnesty declared after the February Revolution. The rapid increase in Cheka personnel was driven by a vast expansion of its responsibilities. As the Cheka moved with the Soviet government from Petrograd to Moscow in March 1918 and established its permanent headquarters in the Lubyanka, Chekas were being established throughout the country in each province and district.

In June 1918 Dzerzhinsky presided over an 'All-Russian Conference of Chekas' and attempted to model the disparate provincial and district Chekas according to the organization at the Lubyanka, their Moscow Headquarters with Departments of Information, Struggle against Counterrevolution, Struggle against Speculation, Transport, Communication and Ports, and an Operational Department, which became a Corps of Cheka Troops (later Internal Troops for the Protection of the Republic), was established. A battalion of Cheka troops was stationed in each province, which allowed the government to monitor dissent and suppress work indiscipline and strikes in the factories, protect government infrastructure and provide muscle for grain requisitioning conducted by Party activists.

A 1920-dated ID book for Cheka agent A.P. Bazarov, a member of the Minsk regional Cheka. The document identified him as a member of the organization and stated that he was authorized to do special actions on behalf of the regional Cheka.

By March 1918, Frontier Troops came under Cheka control to prevent illegal border crossings in either direction, and to seize contraband. Frontier Troops often arrested Russian émigrés deceived into returning to Russia in 'false flag' operations, a practice that continued into the 1930s. Railway troops were established during this period, not only guarding the railway lines – at that time the only practical means of moving around the country – but also to guard prisoners being deported to camps.

The Bolsheviks were not only concerned with internal enemies. The experience of the revolt of the Czech Legion in Siberia (1918–20), Western intervention in northern Russia in 1919 and defeat in the Polish–Soviet War (1919–21) sensitized them – if further sensitization was needed – to the danger of foreign intrigue and plotting. On 20 December 1920, three years to the day after the founding of the Cheka, the INO (*Inostranny Otdel*; 'Foreign Department'), the predecessor of the KGB's famous First Chief Directorate, was founded with Chekist Meier Trilisser as its first chief.

The focus of the Cheka in 1918–20 was fourfold: to consolidate Bolshevik power by repression of opposition political parties and the Orthodox Church; to suppress strikes, demonstrations and absenteeism in the factories; to secure food for the people of the cities by forced requisitioning of grain in a policy called 'War Communism'; and to deal with desertion or indiscipline within the Red Army. During the period of active conflict with White Armies during the Russian Civil War, Bolshevik power in general, and control of the Cheka in particular, was hard to impose in the provinces. Local chiefs and functionaries acted with a good deal of autonomy and engaged in atrocities and brutality reflective of the violent socialization and character defects of the local personnel. Many of the worst atrocities were perpetrated when areas where prisoners or hostages were held were threatened by advancing White Armies, but horrific massacres also occurred after defeat of the Whites, most notably the torture and execution of 'White Guardists' (regime opponents) after their surrender.

Dzerzhinsky with Cheka colleagues in 1922. Standing (left to right): Vladimir A. Gerson; Abram Yakovlevich Belenky; Genrikh Grigoryevich Yagoda; Georgii Ivanovich Blagonravov; Stanislav Frantsevich Redens. Sitting (left to right): Stanislav Adamovich Messing; Jēkabs Peterss; Józef Unszlicht; Dzerzhinsky; Vyacheslav Rudolfovich Menzhinsky; Gleb Ivanovich Bokii; Artur Khristyanovich Artuzov. (Laski Collection/Getty Images)

Not only combatants were killed, however; class enemies, speculators and counter-revolutionaries were often rounded up and killed as well. In practice, a counter-revolutionary could be any person who expressed discontent, or who by virtue of their class might be likely to be discontented, and a speculator could be anyone trying to feed their family by buying food on the black market to supplement their rations. Although by 1920 the White Armies had largely been defeated in the field and central control was being asserted, the policy of War Communism had created such widespread dissatisfaction that the Cheka now had to deal with numerous peasant rebellions. During 1920–21, vast sections of the countryside including many of the most agriculturally productive regions were in open rebellion, some controlled for a time by peasant armies. Factory workers too were disillusioned by long hours, the suppression of their voices in the Soviets, and the militarization of their workplaces with strike-breaking, lockouts and arrests of labour agitators.

A EARLY LEADERS OF THE CHEKA

These three men are pictured during an October 1920 meeting in the Lubyanka in Moscow. Formerly housing the All-Russia Insurance Company, these premises were seized in 1918 and became the Moscow Headquarters of the Cheka.
(1) Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky

The first head of the Soviet regime's secret police sits at his desk. 'Iron Felix' did not wear a uniform, typically sporting Russian closed-collar dress shirts as depicted here. On his left breast he wears the Order of the Red Banner of the RSFSR (**2**) on a cloth rosette. Dzerzhinsky was born on 30 August 1877 OS (11 September 1877 NS) to ethnically Polish parents; his father was a teacher. Fluent in Polish, Russian, Yiddish and Latin, Dzerzhinsky was expelled from school in 1895 after joining a Marxist group. He became heavily involved in revolutionary activities and was arrested and imprisoned in 1897; subsequently released, exiled and rearrested, he escaped from exile in Siberia and fled to Germany, where he worked with other revolutionaries from across Europe. A new cycle of arrest, exile and escape began 1905, by which time Dzerzhinsky had attracted the attention of the Okhrana. Imprisoned in late 1912, he remained incarcerated until the February Revolution of 1917, during which time he was beaten so severely that his jaw and mouth were permanently disfigured. Although initially planning to travel to Poland in 1917, Dzerzhinsky remained in Moscow and joined the Bolsheviks, supporting Lenin's implacable opposition to coalition government. In December 1917, Lenin appointed Dzerzhinsky as the director of the Cheka, a role he held as the Cheka became the GPU and then the OGPU, until his death of a heart attack in Moscow on 20 July 1926.

(3) Jēkabs Peterss

The former deputy head of the Cheka, Peterss has arrived from Tashkent to visit his old boss. Dzerzhinsky was a proponent of leather uniforms and clothing, thinking they did not spread lice in the same way as regular cloth. Peterss wears a button-down tunic under his civilian leather jacket. His visor cap was also custom made of black leather with a simple red Bolshevik star. He has allocated himself a fine pair of officer's cavalry boots and carries a holstered German Mauser C96 'Broomhandle' pistol. Born in Brinken, Latvia on 21 November 1886 OS (3 December 1886 NS) to Latvian parents, Peterss had a reputation as a bloodthirsty thug and was known in the West due to having lived in London for a time and having much trouble with the local

police. Returning to Russia with his English wife May and daughter Maisie in May 1917, Peterss moved to Petrograd and was involved in the October Revolution. A prominent Chekist, Peterss moved from one senior state security job to another before finally being arrested by his compatriots and executed on 25 April 1938.

(4) Cheka NCO

This *starshina* (senior sergeant) wears a captured British Army officers' five-button tunic. His rank is denoted by the three triangles on his left sleeve; the star above the triangles was for all ranks. His breeches and boots are both Tsarist officer issue, while his headwear is the pointed *budenovka* cap, made popular by Red Army commander Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny and representing Russian pointed helmets from the Middle Ages. He carries an M1895 Winchester 'Russian Contract' rifle in 7.62×54mmR calibre; these rifles were made for the Russian military and found their way to imperial Russian police units.

A 1922-dated ID book for a member of the Georgian regional Cheka. Note his simple uniform with no regular insignia.

Of greater concern, though, were desertions and mutinies in the Red Army and especially by sailors of the Baltic Fleet at Kronstadt, among the

earliest and most dedicated of the Bolsheviks' early supporters. Although the Kronstadt rebellion (1–18 March 1921) was crushed by the Red Army under Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky and many death sentences were meted out by Yakov Saulovich Agranov, a senior Chekist, again there was some concern that the Petrograd Cheka was sympathetic. With this flashing danger signal, Lenin called a temporary tactical retreat in March 1921 and announced the NEP (New Economic Policy), which reinstated a diluted market economy and promised an end to requisitions. He imposed this against considerable resistance on the Party's left, an ideologic controversy exploited by Stalin in his manoeuvring for power after Lenin's death on 27 January 1924. The Cheka itself was under pressure from those who thought that its usefulness had passed with the military defeat of the White Armies by 1920, and from others who feared its unconstrained powers. In 1920, the death penalty was once again briefly abolished, representing a de facto reduction in Cheka power, and the Cheka budget was slashed; numbers of employees then estimated as high as 280,000 fell dramatically. Finally, on 6 February 1922, the Cheka was dissolved.

THE GPU AND OGPU

In reality, the Cheka was simply renamed on the very day it was dissolved; and the creation of the GPU (*Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie*; 'State Political Directorate') was just the first of many bureaucratic reshufflings to come. The GPU's remit was somewhat circumscribed as a gesture – albeit a temporary one – to the Cheka's critics who feared the Cheka's independent powers. Administratively, the GPU was subordinated to the NKVD in Russia, at that time called the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR), and thus – at least by charter – did not have full authority in the outlying territories. Dzerzhinsky remained in charge and most of the leadership remained in post.

Summary executions of counter-revolutionaries were suspended, though later reinstated, and – nominally at least – political suspects were to be tried by the NKIu. By August 1922, however, the GPU was granted authority to sentence or exile counter-revolutionaries without any legal process, even in the absence of commission of a crime. By November 1923, exile destinations could include the Solovki Islands far north in the White Sea, often considered to be the first of the camp complexes that made up what would later be called the GULAG system.

In December 1922, the RSFSR was incorporated into a larger polity: the USSR, or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The GPU's responsibilities were expanded beyond the RSFSR and it was renamed the OGPU (*Obyedinyonnoye Gosudarstvennoye Politicheskoye Upravleniye*; 'Unified State Political Directorate') on 15 November 1923 with an OGPU branch in each of the constituent republics of the USSR. As with the Cheka, the OGPU was once again answerable to the Sovnarkom. Little else changed, however, and Dzerzhinsky remained in charge with Menzhinsky as his second-in-command and Yagoda as Menzhinsky's principal deputy. In fact, Dzerzhinsky was assigned additional duties beyond his role in the OGPU, and this and his boss's deteriorating health led Menzhinsky to assume greater responsibilities over time, eventually running the OGPU's day-to-day operations before Dzerzhinsky's death on 20 July 1926.

The USSR's most senior leaders turned out for Dzerzhinsky's funeral on 22 July 1926, among them many future victims of the Great Terror. From left to right: Aleksey Ivanovich Rykov, Soviet premier 1924–30, executed 15 March 1938; Genrikh Grigoryevich Yagoda, future NVKD head, executed 15 March 1938; Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin, Soviet head of state 1919–46; Leon Trotsky, former People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, subsequently exiled and assassinated in Mexico City by NKVD agent Ramón Mercader on 21 August 1940; Lev Borisovich Kamenev, deputy prime minister, executed 25 August 1936; Stalin; Mikhail Pavlovich Tomsky, trade union leader, subsequently accused of terrorism and conspiracy, committed suicide on 22 August 1936; and Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, Comintern general secretary, executed 15 March 1938. (Archiv Gerstenberg/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

Attitudes and objectives

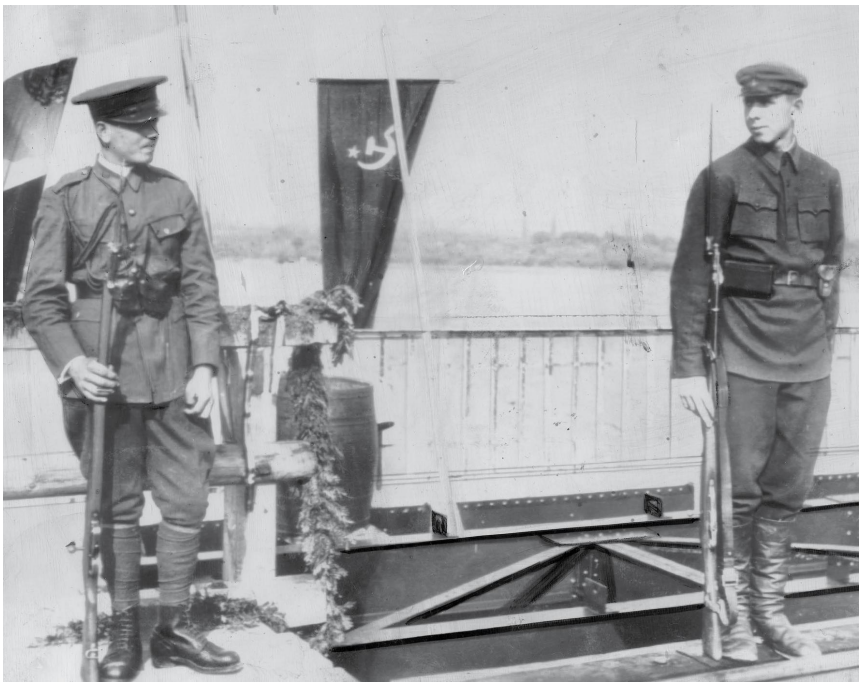
The White Forces, the Bolsheviks' most capable Civil War adversaries, never managed to unify themselves politically, to link up their geographically separated armies, to coordinate offensives against the Bolsheviks or to consolidate political support in the territories they occupied; but they were in fact the most militarily capable opponents faced by the Reds. After 1920, although there were strikes, riots, rebellions and many instances of terrorism or other forms of violence against Soviet officials, the actual survival of Soviet rule was not seriously in question. It certainly did not seem that way to the Soviet government, however. The Bolsheviks were captives to a siege mentality of capitalist encirclement. Many of them believed that the success of the February Revolution in Russia was an anomaly of the unique circumstances of World War I and that the survival of their revolution was dependent on the success of revolutions in the wider capitalist world. Soviet government policies, and those of the Comintern (Communist International) which it controlled, were intended to

attempt to foment worldwide revolution in the capitalist world by stirring up labour unrest and promoting class, ethnic and national tensions. According to Marxist–Leninist theory, capitalist competition for markets would inevitably lead to imperialist war, thus creating the material conditions for proletariat revolution. The Bolsheviks hoped a wider imperialist war would lead to revolutionary upheaval in Western countries, as had occurred in the Russian Empire during World War I. The Bolsheviks, convinced that their very survival depended on world revolution, considered it their moral obligation to destroy the Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie, represented by the wider capitalist world, and they continually aroused Western ire by their blunt and poorly disguised attempts to stir up trouble. They persisted in this even though they were at the same time trying to win diplomatic recognition for the nascent USSR and secure much-needed foreign credits for industrial development.

Cheka, OGPU and NKVD personnel carried much the same weapons as their Red Army counterparts. Designed by Russian artillery officer Sergei Ivanovich Mosin and Belgian inventor Leon Henri Nagant, the 7.62mm M1891 Mosin-Nagant bolt-action rifle had a five-shot magazine. In its original infantry version, the rifle was equipped with a cruciform-blade socket bayonet. Most of the original production run was arsenal-refurbished in 1930 to the

M1891/30 configuration, the rifles being shortened to 123cm and with changes to the sights, the addition of a front-sight protector and a few other modifications to simplify manufacture. This example was manufactured in the Tula Arsenal in 1923; the receiver is marked 'RSFSR' and has a German repair-depot marking on the stock, indicating German capture of the rifle during World War II.

Given these beliefs, the Bolsheviks considered themselves to be engaged in a do-or-die struggle with the capitalist world and assumed the reverse was also true: that the capitalist world for its own survival was committed to the destruction of the Soviet government by any means at its disposal. Despite capitalist competition for markets, the Soviets assumed the capitalist countries could act as an 'Imperialist Bloc' to effect the destruction of the USSR. This bloc would certainly use surviving bourgeois 'elements' in the USSR, whether they be monarchists, bourgeois liberals, religious leaders or intellectuals, poets and authors, educators and scientists or ethnic groups with nationalist tendencies. The Imperialist Bloc would recruit any surviving 'anti-regime' elements remaining in the USSR to sabotage and destabilize the USSR, much as the Comintern attempted to recruit sympathizers in Western countries to foment a proletarian revolution. The petit bourgeoisie that had survived the class warfare of the Russian Civil War, such as bourgeois specialists running factories, banks and even some of the people's commissariats as well as those empowered by the NEP – traders, artisans and many others involved in the market economy – seemed to the Soviet government to be an obvious fifth column. Better-off farmers, known as *kulaks* ('fists'), were thought to be especially pernicious. For the OGPU this was a truly massive population of malcontents whose malign talents seemed ready to be exploited by the class enemy and thus required a potent response.



The USSR–Romanian border, *c.*1930. The Soviet guard is on the right. Only those deemed the most loyal were selected to join the troops manning the Soviet frontier. (Nik Cornish at **www.stavka.org.uk**)

Methods and means

During the OGPU period (1923–34), the techniques and procedures were more varied and more sophisticated than during the time of the Cheka. Under Menzhinsky, OGPU methods, while remaining brutal in many instances, could when appropriate reveal greater degrees of sophistication and nuance, particularly in foreign or counter-intelligence operations, or those involving domestic intelligentsia and cultural figures. Tighter centralized control was eventually exerted over the provincial, regional and city OGPU branches, and greater care was taken to hire employees with higher literacy rates and educational levels. The leadership assessed that this was vital to disabling the surviving intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, who were assumed to be cleverer and better concealed in society and thus harder to unmask. As a result, the OGPU became a highly professional, secretive and more permanent organization, though reorganizations and changes in personnel remained frequent. Secrecy became even more obsessive, and to obfuscate its structure to outsiders, OGPU reports were signed by name, but not the name of the originating office or branch or even its location. As a result, even today, it is hard to name the different OGPU branches or their

staff members at any given time, this information often needing to be pieced together by other surviving documents, award certificates or personal memoirs and reminiscences.

The OGPU's currency was information. This was obtained (with varying degrees of sophistication) by having listeners on bread lines or in shops, offices and factories generating reports on the mood of the people, to the interception and inspection of mail and telegrams. It is estimated that before Lenin died on 21 January 1924, over 5 million letters and 8 million telegrams – essentially all countrywide communications – were being read each year. Only important government or Party leaders had telephones at that time, a simple system called the *Vertushka* (the Russian word for 'rotary dials'); virtually all of these were tapped, with the transcripts seen by the General Secretary of the Communist Party – Stalin. As General Secretary, Stalin also received direct reports from senior members of the OGPU, often tasking them to report back directly to him confidentially on other Party members or government officials. They of course viewed this as career-enhancing and evidence of their trusted status, though without their knowledge their subordinates were likewise often secretly instructed to report on them.

Agents of the Fourth Main Directorate wearing civilian dress escort Stalin, late 1920s. (Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

The flow of information thus obtained was truly massive, but was just one part of parallel information streams derived from the Fourth Main

Directorate, the Comintern, Soviet diplomats, TASS news agency journalists and legions of confidential informants and denouncers. The Secret Department, an organ of the Party Secretariat, was the clearing-house; and the sum total of this was seen by one person alone – again Stalin who, as General Secretary at the time of Lenin's death, was in a very strong position to pre-empt opposition as he was head of the Party and enjoyed information supremacy. Stalin's monopoly on information sources made his position unassailable. The OGPU supported Stalin in his consolidation of power and struggle to defeat oppositional factions. Although Menzhinsky and Yagoda served Stalin faithfully in the repression of bona fide opponents – and were also willing to engage in obvious illegal activity, including the fabrication of evidence for show trials – Stalin had not appointed them, and his innate suspicion and his relative omniscience related to his monopoly of information showed that some OGPU personnel might not be so politically reliable. This was starkly illustrated in a supposedly confidential conversation on 11 July 1928 between opposition leaders Lev Borisovich Kamenev and Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, during which they discussed the possibility of ousting Stalin; Kamenev reportedly stated that 'Yagoda and Trilasser are with us.' Both of these OGPU figures came to grief in the Great Terror of the 1930s.

Foreign intelligence and cultural influence

An example of the OGPU's capacity for sophistication is evident in foreign-intelligence operations. A number of 'White Guardists' and other opponents of the Soviet regime had successfully emigrated from the RSFSR during the Russian Civil War and some had gone underground in place. Efforts were now made to lure those suspected to be the most dangerous back to the USSR. In one example, Operation *Trest* (Trust), OGPU *agents provocateurs* travelled abroad disguised as recruiting agents for a fictional monarchist organization, and made contact with former White Russian generals and even Grand Duke Nikolai, cousin of the deposed Tsar Nicholas II. This operation, initiated in the late Cheka period, grew to great complexity and ran until it was publicly revealed in 1927, successfully exposing monarchist sympathizers in the USSR and luring émigrés – and former British spy Sidney Reilly – back to the USSR where they were arrested immediately by the OGPU's Frontier Troops. Although there were some embarrassing Soviet intelligence failures, foreign-intelligence operations often uncovered

much compromising material confirming Western hostility to the USSR, further deepening the Soviets' already deeply held view of the likelihood of imperialist-bloc plans to subvert the USSR, either by overt military intervention or by means of sabotage via a fifth column of anti-Soviet elements.

Very high-quality M1924 tunic for the equivalent of a lieutenant-general in the OGPU, a deputy department head or the head of an OGPU organization in the far reaches of the

USSR. On the left breast is pinned the badge for the 10th anniversary of the OGPU in 1933, adorned with the head of Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Cheka.

Another area in which the OGPU exhibited more sophistication and used a lighter touch was in the cultural sphere. It is hard to overestimate the importance of artists, writers, poets, musicians and the theatre in the days before television, the internet and modern communications. Stalin said that 'artists are engineers of human souls' and was aware of the danger that they might support the bourgeois class enemy. Consequently, the OGPU used a series of manipulations, threats, rewards, blandishments and even bribery to secure support, or at least passivity from the intelligentsia. OGPU operatives with literary pretensions such as Menzhinsky, Yagoda and Agranov 'befriended' artists and writers, gaining an ego-boost from their association with big-name luminaries while simultaneously infiltrating their entourages, spying on them and influencing their work. The writer Maxim Gorky (Alexei Maximovich Peshkov), living on the island of Capri until 1930, was seduced into returning to the USSR and was chaperoned by Yagoda on a carefully arranged 'Potemkin village' trip to the Belomorkanal (White Sea–Baltic Canal). This massive slave-labour construction project was then praised by Gorky, resulting in great prestige for both the OGPU and Stalin's regime.

OGPU personnel are pictured searching suspects in this posed photograph from the early 1930s. The Border Troops used many dogs to patrol the USSR's borders. (Archiv Gerstenberg/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

OGPU guards watch over a scene from the 1924 trial of Boris Viktorovich Savinkov, a professional revolutionary and briefly a member of Russia's Provisional Government in mid-1917. Savinkov was lured back to the USSR in August 1924 by the OGPU, arrested, tried and sentenced to death, though this was later commuted to ten years' imprisonment; his death on 7 May 1925 was recorded as suicide, but some commentators assert that he was killed by his OGPU captors. The judges sitting at the table wear the 1922 Red Army tunics for high-ranking members. They would not have been members of the OGPU, rather the Revolutionary Military Tribunal. (Bettmann/Getty Images)

A further area of collaboration between the intelligentsia and the OGPU was in the latter's use of playwrights and theatre directors to help stage show trials for the benefit of the regime. The OGPU had no qualms about the truth or falsehood of the allegations made against the defendants, only that the appropriate points be made, resulting in public support for the regime. In some ways the Shakhty Trial of 18 May 1928 was the first significant show trial and an important precursor to the show trials of the 1930s. Stalin's principal problem was the following: often, despite the touted success of the Revolution, workers in whose name the Revolution had supposedly been carried out still lived poorly with inadequate food, crowded unsanitary housing conditions, and brutal suppression of work indiscipline or absenteeism. Worse, the emphasis on meeting production norms at any cost led to high rates of industrial accidents and worker deaths. The managerial class – leftover bourgeois *spetsi* ('specialists') – enjoyed conspicuously better food, housing, healthcare, personal servants and access to plumbing and electricity. The Shakhty Trial targeted these bourgeois managers, some of whom were foreign nationals, making the case that the *spetsi* were agents of Western capitalists and Russian émigrés

and were intentionally sabotaging the Soviet system. In this analysis, incidents that appeared to be industrial accidents were actually part of a concerted campaign of economic intervention conducted to bring down the Revolution. At the same time, corrupt and venal Party officials and managers who failed to detect this sabotage were either treasonably complicit or at the very least guilty of insufficient revolutionary vigilance – also a crime under the Soviet penal code. Taken altogether, the Shakhty Trial represented that nexus between the malign activities of foreign capitalists and hostile class elements at home, reinforced revolutionary consciousness in the workers, sent a warning shot across the bow of corrupt Party officials and was the final nail in the coffin of the NEP.

OGPU officer's visor cap with the standard blue and red colours of the state security organs. In 1927 a black leather chin strap was added. The cap design did not vary by rank, but often the higher ranks had visor caps of much superior quality, like the one shown here.

Collectivization and starvation

The most notable event during the OGPU period was the collectivization of agriculture in the USSR. In 1917, Lenin had acquiesced in the appropriation of land by peasants because their support, vital to the Bolshevik triumph, would otherwise have gone to the Socialist Revolutionaries. After the turmoil of War Communism, with its grain requisitioning and widespread peasant revolts, of necessity he brought in the NEP, thus reintroducing a market-based system in the countryside. Although this resulted in a significant recovery of agriculture by 1928–29, the system of combining socialism in the urban centres with capitalism in the countryside was

thought intolerable and, following Marxist–Leninist logic, was considered to be an ongoing danger to the survival of the Revolution. Much of the political infighting among communists in the government centred on the pace and timing of collectivization, not the fact of it; but with political factions firmly defeated by 1928, Stalin staked his prestige and political survival on rapid forced collectivization.

The hope was to rationalize the agricultural system, resulting in bountiful harvests, using the excess grain to generate cash for rapid industrialization. Thus would the USSR become a modern industrial power with (finally) a strong military to face a relentlessly hostile world. There was, however, an underlying problem – the 'scissors' problem – in which the high price and scarcity of industrial goods combined with the low price of grain to disincentivize the peasants from selling excess grain. Although Article 107 of the Soviet Penal Code made it illegal to withhold grain from sale, extremely high requisitioning quotas inevitably threatened the actual survival of the peasantry. The peasants who had thrived under the NEP were now declared 'kulaks' and official government policy, as made explicit in a Politburo resolution of 5 January 1930, was to liquidate the kulaks as a class. The definition of a kulak was never formalized, however, and ultimately any opponent of collectivization was to be deported or starved in place. Already in January 1928 the crime of 'not releasing goods to market' was made punishable by up to three years' imprisonment. Under collectivization all grain, livestock and farm implements were state property and any theft of state property was made a criminal offence incurring penalties up to and including execution. Trying to escape famine zones was prevented with the introduction of an Internal Passport intended to stop starving people from fleeing to the cities.

M1924 visor caps for members of the OGPU Transport Troops. These units used a combination of magenta and black insignia; in the example shown below, the magenta crown and black band have changed colour as a result of heavy wear and harsh sunlight. The transportation units were responsible for much of the logistics of the state security organs as well as the trains that brought prisoners to the infamous GULAG penal colonies.

The OGPU and NKVD were responsible for the administration of the GULAG penal camp system. This OGPU guard at the Solovki prison camp in the late 1920s is most likely a member of the OGPU Transport Troops bringing new convicts to the camp. (Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/ Getty Images)

B COLLECTIVIZATION, UKRAINE, 1933

All branches of the OGPU were involved in Stalin's brutal collectivization plan in Ukraine that led to the 'Holomodor', the man-made famine that led to the deaths of millions of civilians. The failure of the collectivization led to a steep decline in grain production, a failure Stalin and the Party blamed on 'counter

revolutionary peasants', while the urban workers were building a communist new world. With this in mind the policy enacted by the state security forces involved seizing all the peasants' grain to make up the quotas the state had set for the collective farms. The grain would then go to the urban workers via a quota system, some of whom were able to help their peasant relatives in the countryside, although this was considered a crime in itself. In this Ukrainian village two members of the OGPU *Militsya* (uniformed police) escort three members of the Komsomol (*Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodyozhi*; 'Young Communist League'), as they seize grain from the peasants.

(1) Officer, OGPU *Militsya*

The police officer on the far left holds the rank of 3rd Category (junior lieutenant), denoted by the single square on the collar of his M1931 service uniform. Police ranks were unique and separate from the other OGPU branches. Officers would often wear the five-button tunic instead of the pullover version. He has been awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour of the type issued during 1931–36 (**2**). OGPU officers, and later NKVD officers, were often given civilian awards rather than their combat equivalents as they were not considered to be military personnel until World War II. He holds an M1895 Nagant revolver, the standard sidearm for the Soviet security services.

(3) Militiaman, OGPU *Militsya*

The policeman to the police officer's left carries a Tsarist-era Mosin-Nagant M1891 rifle. Police units were often issued with older firearms that were deemed obsolete for front-line forces. He wears the M1931 lightweight pullover service tunic along with the 'bobby'-style police helmet issued the same year. His rank tabs are blank, denoting the rank of militiaman, the entry-level rank.

(4), (5) & (6) Komsomol members

Komsomol members were young, from the cities, and very idealistic regarding the communist dream. They wear the standard 1930s–40s Komsomol uniforms as they happily seize the farmers' grain they truly believe has been stolen 'from the people'. Future Soviet leaders such as Yuri Vladimirovich

Andropov, later head of the KGB, were very active in the Komsomol in the 1930s and 1940s.

The notorious Belomorkanal (White Sea–Baltic Canal) was constructed using forced labour during 1931–33; between 12,000 and 240,000 GULAG inmates died in the process. This group of officers includes (third from right) Matvei Davidovich Berman, head of the GULAG system, who was convicted of terrorism and sabotage and executed on 7 March 1939; and (at right) Naftaly Aronovich Frenkel, a former prisoner who rose swiftly to run his own camp, was credited with the notorious 'nourishment scale' in which an inmate's food rations were linked to his rate of production, and managed to survive the Great Terror. (Laski Diffusion/Getty Images)

The enforcement of collectivization fell primarily to the OGPU and to Party activists (the '25,000ers') who were sent to the countryside to find hidden grain stores. All branches of the OGPU participated: Border Troops, to prevent escape of kulaks to the cities or abroad; Internal Troops, to subdue resistance; and Convoy/Escort Troops, to accompany the deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia. The Red Army's conscripts were used sparingly because of their demographically predominant peasant origins; the officer class was thought to have Rightist (anti-collectivization) sympathies and the rank and file might identify with the peasants. This was despite close supervision of the Red Army by the OGPU Special Detachments (OO or *Osobyi Otdeli* in Russian) the job of which was to monitor loyalty in the military. With appalling loss of life due to famine, deportation and maltreatment, collectivization was imposed though Soviet agricultural

productivity never recovered. The drive to make it succeed, however – ‘success’ being defined by the fact of its being imposed, not its actual success – was celebrated at the 17th Party Congress, the so-called ‘Congress of Victors’, held during 26 January–10 February 1934. Tellingly, in a somewhat candid remark Stalin acknowledged to Winston Churchill during World War II that collectivization was the only time when he, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, was ever truly nervous and feared failure.

C THE SOVIET INVASION OF CHINA, 1934

In 1934, on the plains near Manchuria, members of the OGPU discuss further operations against Chinese warlord forces. While regular OGPU units attacked Chinese forces, these members of the OGPU Frontier Troops, or Border Guards, hold the rear and protect the Soviet border.

(1) Senior officer, OGPU Frontier Troops

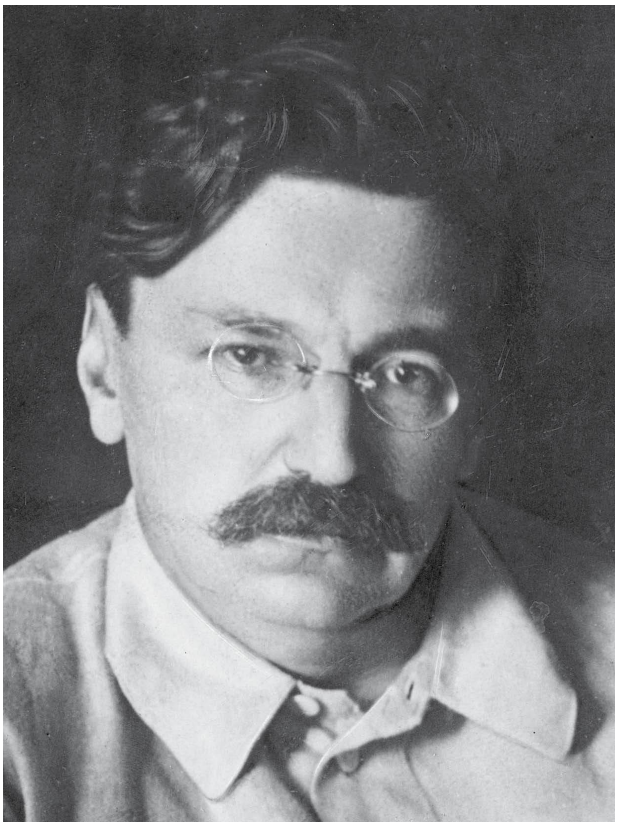
At left, a 'general' of the OGPU Frontier Troops looks across the Chinese border. Although the OGPU did not use the rank of general – nor did any branch of the Soviet armed forces until 1940 – his rank is equal to that of a lieutenant-general, or at the time in the Red Army, a divisional commander. He is most likely head of the provinces border forces. He wears a very high-quality M1924 five-button tunic with rank now displayed on the collar instead of the sleeve. His two diamonds display his rank while the green collar tabs denote the Frontier Troops. On his left breast is the 10 Years of the OGPU badge (**2**) with the head of 'Iron Felix' prominently displayed. He wears standard Red Army/OGPU officer's breeches with a magenta stripe that matches the piping around the collar tabs. His cap is the M1924 Frontier Troops unique-coloured visor cap. The colours of this cap remained the same for the entire history of the USSR. The leather chin strap was added to all caps in 1927.

(3) Junior officer, OGPU Frontier Troops

To his left is a lieutenant of the Frontier Troops, his rank being denoted by two small squares on the collar tabs. He wears an M1924 uniform that is for field use, with the tunic being of a pullover style and matching khaki breeches. He wears the single-claw belt with his M1895 Nagant revolver being holstered.

(4) Driver, OGPU Transport Troops

Behind the two officers is a member of the OGPU Transport Troops, who were usually involved in the railroad and penal camp system. The senior commander has selected this individual to take him to the front. The driver leans against an Austin 3rd Series armoured car, captured from the Imperial Russian Army and used for internal security duties. He is cleaning his Mauser C96 'Broomhandle' pistol. Many Red Army armour drivers wore leather uniforms and he is no different. He has found an old Imperial Russian Army leather uniform, removed the rank boards and put it to good use. His visor cap has the unique colours for OGPU Transport Troops – magenta with a black cap band.



Born in Poland in 1874, Vyacheslav Menzhinsky was a law graduate who escaped arrest in Russia in 1906, returning in 1917 and rapidly ascending the ranks of the Cheka, becoming an adherent of Stalin and head of the OGPU after Dzerzhinsky's death on 20 July 1926. Ill-health and the physical legacy of a car accident in Paris meant that Menzhinsky was bedridden for the final years of his life. Menzhinsky died on 10 May 1934, with his death subsequently ascribed to improper treatment on the part of Yagoda and his subordinates. (ullstein bild via Getty Images)

Genrikh Yagoda. Menzhinsky's poor health meant that Yagoda, as his deputy, was responsible for conducting day-to-day OGPU business on behalf of his boss. Yagoda was arrested in March 1937 and tried in March 1938 at the so-called Trial of the Twenty-One. Convicted of wrecking, espionage, Trotskyism and conspiracy, Yagoda was summarily executed on 15 March 1938. (PhotoQuest/Getty Images)

THE NKVD

Reorganization and leadership changes

Menzhinsky died on 10 May 1934 after a long, debilitating illness. Long before this, Yagoda, his first deputy, had taken over the quotidian management of the OGPU. Two months to the day after Menzhinsky died, the OGPU was subsumed into a newly reorganized, all-union NKVD and Yagoda was named People's Commissar of Internal Affairs. Previously the NKVD had responsibility for police, border security functions, railroad security, firefighting and prison guards within the RSFSR only; state security was handled in all the republics of the USSR by the OGPU. Now the OGPU was reorganized as the GUGB (*Glavnoye Upravleniye Gosurdarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*; 'Main Directorate for State Security') within the NKVD, other main directorates being called the GURKM (*Glavnoye Upravleniye Raboce-krest'yanskoi Militisyi*; 'Main Directorate of Workers' and Peasants' Militia' or ordinary police), the GUPVO (*Glavnoye Upravleniye Pogranicnoi i Vnytrennei Okhrany*; 'Main Directorate of Border and Internal Guards'), the GULAG (*Glavnoye Upravleniye Lagerey*; 'Main Directorate for Camps'), the Convoy Guards or GTU (*Glavnoye Transpotnoie Upravleniye*; 'Main Directorate for Transport') and others covering railways, firefighting and economic affairs. During World War II the GUPVI (*Glavnoye Upravleniye Voyennoplennikh i Internirovannikh*; 'Main Directorate of POWs and Interned Persons') was added, although these imprisoned groups are usually spoken of as GULAG prisoners.

In September 1936, Yagoda was succeeded by Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov; Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria became GUGB chief in September 1939 and then overall head of the NKVD that November. In February 1941, the GUGB was again separated from the NKVD and became a separate NKGB (*Naródnyi Komissariát Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*; 'People's Commissariat of State Security'), while the OO (*Osobye Otdely*; 'Special Departments') responsible for military counterintelligence were now detached from the NKVD and were administered separately by the Red Army and Red Navy. Vsevolod Nikolayevich Merkulov, an acolyte of Beria, became People's Commissar of the NKGB.

The NKGB was returned to administrative control of the NKVD in July 1941, shortly after the beginning of Operation *Barbarossa*, the Axis invasion of the USSR. At this time, Merkulov was made deputy People's Commissar of the NKVD, and was once again subordinate to Beria.

Kirov with Stalin. (Library of Congress/Corbis/VCG via Getty Images)

Two changes occurred in 1943: the NKGB was again re-established as a separate commissariat with Merkulov as head, with major directorates controlling Foreign Intelligence, Counterintelligence, Transport Security, Sabotage and Special Tasks, Codes and Cyphers, Government Protection and Kremlin Protection Services. At the same time, Military Counterintelligence was taken away from Red Army and Red Navy control and reorganized into SMERSH (*Smert Shpionam*; 'Death to Spies'). SMERSH was in actuality controlled by the NKO (*Naródnyi Komissariát Oborony*; 'People's Commissariat of Defence'), although it was usually considered part of the NKVD/NKGB, with most of its personnel being drawn from these two commissariats. Responsibilities were broad in counter-intelligence but among other duties, SMERSH was responsible for rooting out traitors and defeatists in the Red Army, for the neutralization of

hostile groups in the combat zone such as the Polish Home Army or Ukrainian Partisan Army, and for the 'filtration' of liberated Russian POWs and scrutiny of Soviet civilians in liberated territories who had been trapped behind enemy lines. In 1946 SMERSH was returned to NKVD control just before all the people's commissariats were reorganized as ministries.

The Kirov assassination

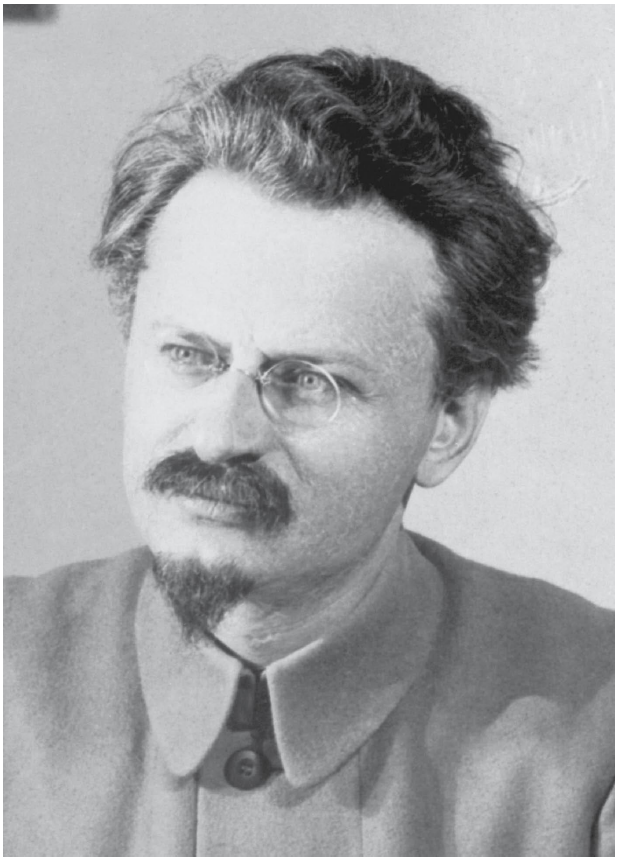
On 1 December 1934, Sergei Mironovich Kirov, the Leningrad Party boss, was assassinated at the Smolny Institute by Leonid Vasilevich Nikolayev, a disaffected Party member who had been purged from the Party, with revenge for this action the apparent motive. Kirov was a close intimate of Stalin and had been personally appointed as Leningrad first Party secretary by Stalin to replace Grigori Yevseyevich Zinoviev, who had been prominent in the 'Left Opposition' to Stalin after Lenin's death. Zinoviev was close to Lev Kamenev, another Left Oppositionist, and had at times pondered collusion with Trotsky – Stalin's arch-nemesis and hated enemy – to oust Stalin from his position as General Secretary of the Communist Party. The fact that their opposition in general and any possible collusion with Trotsky was entirely ineffectual did not diminish Stalin's appreciation of them as a great threat to his position.

Within hours of the assassination of Kirov, an anti-terrorism law was drafted by Stalin and signed by his Politburo. The law provided for expedited trials of suspected terrorists *in camera* without legal representation for – or even presence of – the accused, without right of appeal and with sentences to be carried out without delay. The investigation into Kirov's murder disclosed that some of Nikolayev's acquaintances had worked for Zinoviev and that some defendants had criticized Stalin's collectivization program. The investigation quickly revealed a 'Zinovievite Centre' and resulted in two trials, the second of which implicated Kamenev. The Zinovievites, and now Kamenev, were soon conflated with 'White Guards, wreckers, spies and saboteurs'.

The investigation also revealed extreme laxity on the part of the NKVD itself in protecting Kirov, and confirmed in Stalin's mind that the NKVD was at least asleep on the job, if not in some ways sympathetic to and complicit in the affair. It was not forgotten that Kamenev had implicated Yagoda as being sympathetic to the Left Oppositionists' cause in a 1932 conversation with Bukharin, of which Stalin was aware. Yagoda's

investigation of the Kirov affair succeeded only in proving that Zinoviev and Kamenev were responsible for creating a moral atmosphere in which the assassination could occur, but not their direct involvement, and did not implicate Trotsky in the plot. As a result of this, Zinoviev and Kamenev received prison sentences and were expelled from the Party, but their blood was not yet spilled. Yagoda remained in post, but was suspected of inadequate revolutionary vigilance at the least.

Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov in 1938. Yezhov understood that Stalin sought direct connections between the Left Opposition (Zinoviev and Kamenev), Trotsky and the Right Opposition (Bukharin, Mikhail Tomsky and Aleksey Rykov). In a May 1935 thesis titled ‘From Factional Activity to Open Counterrevolution’, Yezhov established an equivalence between any factional opposition and terrorism against the State. (Hulton-Deutsch/Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images)



Leon Trotsky. It cannot be overemphasized that by 1935, Trotskyism had become a metaphor for any opposition to Stalin, real or imagined, past or present, and whether the individual had renounced their prior beliefs or not. In Stalinist logic, a struggle against Stalin was a struggle against the whole Soviet system; a counter-revolutionary struggle to reimpose capitalism itself. To do this, opponents were willing to work with the Imperialist bloc, including Fascists, hence the insistence during the Purge and its show trials on having defendants be unmasked as foreign spies. Only in the Byzantine world of the Marxist–Leninist dialectic could Trotskyism be equated with a desire to reimpose capitalism while working with the Gestapo. (Bettmann/Getty Images)

The Great Terror gathers momentum

Stalin's paranoia was further fuelled by the unmasking of a 'Kremlin plot' that uncovered Kremlin employees who had been former aristocrats or other class enemies. Protection of the Kremlin had previously been the responsibility of the Defence Commissariat, but now devolved to the NKVD, not to Yagoda but instead to a rising star favoured by Stalin, Nikolai Yezhov, who was now tasked with oversight and investigation of the Central Executive Committee and of the Kremlin staff.

As a result of the Kremlin plot, Avel Safronovich Enukidze, a longstanding Stalin associate, was expelled from the Party. This set a

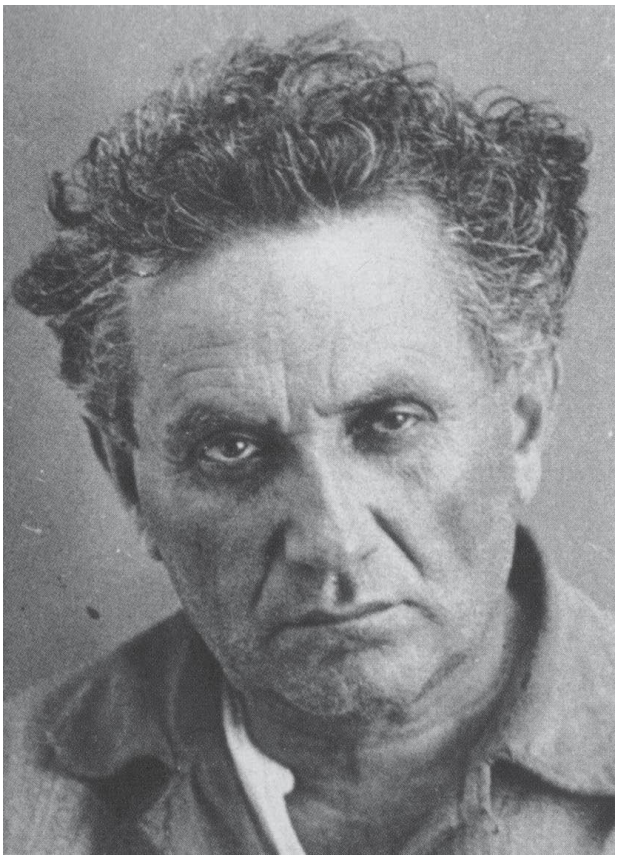
precedent as he was the first old Bolshevik to be expelled without ever having joined any opposition group; he was accused of having protected anti-Soviet elements within the Kremlin itself and for the time being was demoted, though subsequently executed on 30 October 1937.

Subsequent to the ‘verification’ campaign of the Kremlin staff and Central Committee, Yezhov was now tasked with investigation of the Party membership as a whole. As a result, over 200,000 Party members were expelled, with some characterized as ‘White Guardists’, anti-Soviet elements or even foreign spies. The Kirov investigation had proved, to Stalin’s way of thinking, that the worst enemy was ‘one with a Party card’ and that simple expulsion from the Party was insufficient. After all, Nikolayev had been expelled from the Party, but went on to carry out the openly terroristic act of assassinating Kirov.

The ubiquitous long leather coat used by all branches of the NKVD. While not a standard-issue item, it was acquired by most officers in the internal security services. Cut and design could vary by maker, but the overall look was the same. This example was worn by a captain of NVKD Internal Troops *c.*1935–40.

While Yezhov gained in power and influence with Stalin, Yagoda tried to protect himself and please the boss by providing evidence of ongoing Trotskyite activity within the USSR and recommending the execution of those accused of Trotskyism. To make up for his earlier laxity, in June

1936, Yagoda sent lists of Trotskyites to Stalin – including the names of Zinoviev and Kamenev – with a recommendation that they be executed. Yagoda began circulating exhortations to his NKVD subordinates to avoid sentimentality or kind-heartedness in their treatment of Trotskyites and other enemies, equating inactivity – the failure to prosecute opposition vigorously – with terrorism itself.



Zinoviev shortly after his arrest in 1934. The very idea that Zinoviev and other old Bolsheviks had been traitors to the Revolution that they risked their lives to bring about and for which they endured prison time and exile seemed preposterous, and in order to stifle dissent among his associates, Stalin considered it vital that these high-profile prisoners confess explicitly to their crimes. Appeals were made to their Party loyalty and discipline, and promises were made to spare their lives should they cooperate but with sinister threats about their spouses and children if they did not. Interrogation was prolonged and relentless and involved sleep and other sensory deprivation, maltreatment, hunger, cold and hot stress and outright beatings and torture, though such treatment was less prominent in those higher-value prisoners who Stalin wanted to appear in court. (Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

The show trials begin

Stalin wanted to reopen the Kirov investigation in order to hold a show trial; Zinoviev and Kamenev were returned from their prisons in the Ural Mountains and were re-interrogated to implicate themselves in an international Trotskyite conspiracy. At the same time, Trotsky, who had been exiled abroad, was under relentless NKVD surveillance with infiltration of his entourage and that of his son Lev Lvovich Sedov, whose private secretary was an NKVD plant. Even so, there was in fact some opposition even from within Stalin's inner circle to reopening the Kirov case and executing old Bolsheviks, but also against the wider purges that were starting to target their close associates and subordinates.

August 1936: workers in a turbine shop in Leningrad listen to a report of the trial and execution of Zinoviev, Kamenev and 14 others convicted of plotting against Stalin and of complicity in Kirov's murder. Thousands of workers in factories all over the USSR passed resolutions approving of the government's action. (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images)

In a notable example, People's Commissar of Heavy Industry Sergo Konstantinovich Ordzhonikidze spoke against the persecution of engineers and other *spetsi* in his commissariat. Lazar Moiseyevich Kaganovich, People's Commissar of Railways and a close friend of Ordzhonikidze's, denied claims of widespread sabotage by railway engineers. Ordzhonikidze was close to Stalin, but had hired Georgy Leonidovich Pyatakov as his principal deputy at Heavy Industry – and Pyatakov had earlier worked for Trotsky. Pressure was applied to Ordzhonikidze by arresting first Pyatakov, then Ordzhonikidze's older brother, Papulia. Ordzhonikidze was to be forced to denounce wrecking in his commissariat in a Central Committee

plenum to be held on 20 February 1937. To ratchet up the pressure, the NKVD searched his apartment with his wife looking on. In order to avoid having to denounce his own subordinates, most of whom he knew to be innocent, Ordzhonikidze shot himself two days before the plenum was to be held. This act sent a very clear message to Kaganovich and any other doubters that not even a longstanding association with – and the support or even the friendship of – Stalin would permit any resistance to his policies to be allowed.

This M1935 heavy overcoat for an NVKD Internal Troops corps commander, or the equivalent of a Red Army colonel-general, has been attributed to Nikolai Sidorovich Vlasik, Stalin's senior bodyguard. The three diamonds denote his rank, with the magenta piping on the overcoat and the NKVD sleeve insignia identifying his branch of service.

Moscow, 24 July 1936: as part of the All-Union Physical Fitness Culture Parade, senior Soviet leaders leave the Kremlin. Left to right: Yezhov, wearing the M1935 tunic, but in summer white; Georgi Mikhailovich Dimitrov, leader of the Communist International; Kaganovich, People's Commissar of Railways; Stalin; Kalinin; Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan, People's Commissar for External and Internal Trade; Marshal Klement Yefremovich Voroshilov, People's Commissar for Defence; Andrey Andreyevich Andreyev, a close ally of Stalin and a key player in the Great Terror; Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, who signed more execution lists than any other senior Soviet leader, Stalin included, and became the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs in May 1939. (Photo by: Sovfoto/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

During the course of the Great Terror, Zinoviev and Kamenev and lesser figures from the Left Opposition, Bukharin and Rykov (Tomsky shot himself on 22 August 1936 to avoid being arrested), and other lesser figures of the Right Opposition were tried in three show trials convened during 1936–38, found guilty and executed without opposition, in fact with enthusiastic support from Stalin's entourage and the Soviet press. Trotsky, who was unreachable by USSR courts, was assassinated in Mexico City on 21 August 1940.

The net widens

The search for Trotskyites now spread into virtually all the People's Commissariats and other institutions such as the State Bank and State Planning Commission. No longer were any of the People's Commissars willing to defend any of their subordinates. Instead, they were incentivized to demand the blood of arrestees and denounce others, hoping that by doing

so they would avoid being arrested themselves for having tolerated such spies and saboteurs in their midst. The Party was especially hard hit and while some Republican and Provincial Party officials were suspected – especially but not only in Ukraine – for their lukewarm imposition of collectivization and advocacy of relaxation of grain-requisition quotas to try to mitigate the Party-instigated famine in the early 1930s, the momentum of the Great Terror began to ensnare Party officials who had never been oppositional. These unfortunates were now caught between trying to protect their friends whom they knew to be innocent while still demonstrating revolutionary zeal in an attempt to save themselves and avoid charges of complicity. The imposition of central quotas for arrests and executions forced local officials to arrest a high number of victims irrespective of whether they were guilty of anything or not, and not surprisingly, Party officials tried to protect their own appointees. Any association, past or present, with a targeted senior figure was a surefire predictor of being purged oneself.

The M1935 officer's pullover tunic, for an NKVD brigade commander, the equivalent of a major-general in the Red Army. The NKVD insignia is displayed on both sleeves and his rank is denoted by a single diamond. Other than the actual rank insignia these tunics would not vary from lieutenant through to corps commander, all having the same basic design.

Order 00447 ('00' preceding an order indicated top-secret status), drafted in July 1937, divided those arrested by quota into two categories: either they were to be shot immediately, or were to be deported to GULAG penal camps. Trials were brief, often lasting a minute or less, and held without witnesses, lawyers for the accused, or even the presence of the accused

themselves. Sentences were carried out immediately without appeal. One common survival technique of regional officials was to demonstrate zeal by demanding an increase in the arrest or execution quota, resulting in a bloodbath that was both driven from the top down and the bottom up. This tactic increased the death toll, but rarely protected those who employed it. The number of suspected enemies was huge, with over 1.5 million purged from the Party since 1922 and over 100,000 of these considered dangerous. Of the 17th Party Congress – the so-called 'Congress of Victors' held during 26 January–10 February 1934 and which celebrated the success of collectivization – 1,108 of its 1,966 delegates were either executed or arrested. Given the requirement of interrogation and confession with denunciation of others, the number of victims grew exponentially. Judgement and sentencing was carried out by 'troikas' (three-person committees), each consisting of an NKVD official along with a Party official and a representative from the procuracy.

D THE GREAT PURGE, 1937

Sitting at a desk in an interrogation room in the basement of the Lubyanka in late May 1937, Marshal of the USSR Mikhail Tukhachevsky has just signed his confession to treason. Still held in the Russian state archives today, Tukhachevsky’s

handwritten confession has particles of dried blood all over it, suggesting a scenario very similar to what is shown here.

(1) Marshal of the USSR Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky

Known as the 'Red Napoleon', Tukhachevsky came from an aristocratic background. After joining the Red Army, he rose through the ranks to become a trusted commander during the Russian Civil War. Having clashed with Stalin during the failed attempt to take Warsaw during the Polish–Soviet War (1919–21), Tukhachevsky would have a target on his back for the rest of his life. When Stalin began the purges, his top target was the high command of the Red Army, and Tukhachevsky in particular, as these individuals represented a threat to his absolute authority. Having been awarded the Order of Lenin (**2**) on 21 February 1933, Tukhachevsky may have seemed to have been at the heart of the Soviet regime, but on 22 May 1937 he was arrested; after being tortured into making and signing a false confession he was convicted of treason and shot on 12 June.

(3) People's Commissar for Internal Affairs Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov

The head of the NKVD, Nikolai Yezhov, was the man Stalin personally appointed to extract a confession from Marshal Tukhachevsky. Brought in by Stalin to run the NKVD, Yezhov had not risen through the ranks of the Soviet security agencies; his outsider status appeared to offer some hope that the bloodletting might subside, but Yezhov became an avid supporter of arrests, trials, torture and murder, all in the name of maintaining Stalin's rule. He was replaced by Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria as head of the NKVD in November 1938, and was secretly arrested on 10 April 1939. In a trial kept from the eyes of almost everyone, Yezhov was convicted on 2 February 1940 and shot two days later. His arrest, trial and execution were so secret that there were still those who thought he was alive as late as the mid-1940s. Yezhov's privately tailored M1935 pullover reflects his rank, with the large rank stars on the collar, similar to that used by the Red Army's marshals, as well as the large star with hammer-and-sickle sleeve insignia that was unique to his rank. He wears the embroidered NKVD badge

on both sleeves. As there were no official 'generals' at the time, there were no general's double-striped breeches. Instead, he wears a pair of high-quality NKVD officer's breeches as well as the officer's leather 'Sam Browne' belt.

(4) *Leytenant*, NKVD

To Yezhov's right is a young NKVD lieutenant taking notes. He wears an M1935-type pullover tunic with two rank squares on each collar tab. Both the tunic and his unpiped visor cap are in off-white for summer use, but he continues to wear the standard NKVD officer's breeches. The white uniforms of the Red Army and NKVD could vary from an off-white, almost cream colour to a pure bone white.

(5) Interrogator, NKVD

The NKVD thug who has been 'motivating' Marshal Tukhachevsky to confess wears a standard M1935-style pullover with no rank insignia. Knowing what he was about to have to do, and the mess it would cause, this NKVD officer borrowed an unissued tunic to sacrifice. On his right sleeve is the sword-and-shield badge of the NKVD, the same basic imagery used from the Cheka through to the KGB.

The Purge was not limited to government institutions or present or former Party members, however. Because of the mania for interrogation and confessions, Yezhov embroidered an ever-widening patchwork of interconnected fictional conspiracies that could involve any societal group. Former class enemies who had somehow survived the purges of the Red Terror and the Russian Civil War were now arrested and killed or deported in large numbers. Mass operations targeted many national or ethnic groups, with Poles being especially hard hit. In Leningrad, the NKVD apparently went through the telephone book and arrested suspects just for having Polish-sounding names. The former indulgence shown to artists and other cultural figures was no longer in evidence, resulting in the arrest, imprisonment and execution of some of the USSR's most famous authors, poets, musicians, academics and scientists. The Great Terror also extended beyond the borders of the USSR: in May 1937, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), the POUM (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*; 'Workers' Party of Marxist Unification') was repressed in Catalonia

because of alleged Trotskyite sympathies; the NKVD directed a purge in Mongolia, a Soviet satellite state; and many enemies were killed in foreign capital cities, often with a distinct lack of subtlety.

The Red Army and Red Navy were heavily purged and severely damaged in 1937–38, with about 90 per cent of the senior leadership cadres (above the rank of colonel) either executed or imprisoned. Although individuals were accused of conspiracy to bring about a coup against the government in collusion with imperialist powers, there was no truth to any of the charges. Stalin never trusted the Red Army, however, seeing it as a vipers' nest of hidden Right Oppositionists and the sole institution with the power actually to bring down the government. The verification campaign that investigated officers forced them to identify their prior associates and superiors; Trotsky had been Commissar of Defence until forced to resign on 6 January 1925, and so the majority of military officers would have a tainted biography. To increase political reliability, a system of Political Commissars watching over the officers who remained was reinstituted, which not only put officers on notice but also considerably stifled any initiative that might have remained. While Stalin suspected the Red Army of colluding with imperialist powers, those self-same imperialist powers – notably Nazi Germany – in fact colluded with the purge of the Red Army, happily supplying disinformation (reported back by NKVD agents) that seemed to corroborate Stalin's fantasies.

The NKVD in the Great Terror

Yezhov's NKVD was the main hands-on perpetrator of the Great Terror, but was also heavily victimized. Yagoda was denounced by Yezhov at a Central Party Committee plenum in early March 1937 and arrested soon after. Incriminating materials were found in Yagoda's apartment and he was alleged to have conspired against the Soviet state and to have assassinated state officials. A high-profile target, Yagoda was groomed for a show trial (the Trial of the Twenty-One) in March 1938 and forced to testify against himself, though he sought to deny some of the most egregious charges. He was found guilty and sentenced to death on 13 March, and executed on 15 March. All 18 of Yagoda's deputy Commissars of State Security were likewise executed, most simply as a consequence of guilt by association. The NKVD personnel were in a particularly tenuous position; if there were such widespread conspiracies, why had they, the very people tasked with

state security, not detected the malefactors? Interrogators were at risk of being considered too lenient should their prisoners not confess and denounce their confederates, but they could name names that were the interrogators' own associates and so implicate their interrogators in the very fictional plots they were investigating. Over 20,000 NKVD personnel were arrested during 1936–38, including Károly Pauker, the head of bodyguards; Mark Isaevich Gai, head of the Special Sections responsible for military counter-intelligence; and Artur Khristyanovich Artuzov, head of the foreign intelligence directorate. By early 1939, the Great Terror had taken on truly monstrous proportions and there was widespread discontent, however muted. Stalin decided to wind down the Great Terror, blaming Yezhov for its excesses and the persecution of innocent victims. Yezhov was arrested on 10 April 1939 and convicted on 2 February 1940 of crimes notably similar to the charges against Yagoda. He was executed on 4 February 1940.

The venerable 7.62mm M1895 revolver was designed by Leon Henri Nagant and widely used throughout the Imperial Russian Army and by Soviet military and law-enforcement personnel, including the Cheka and its successors.

In the early 1930s the 7.62mm TT semi-automatic pistol entered service with Soviet military and law-enforcement personnel. The simplified TT-33, shown here, lacked the finish of the Colt M1911 or the Radom but it was tough and reliable. The TT-33 never entirely replaced the M1895 Nagant revolver, but it was widely used throughout the entire Soviet period. This example is date-stamped 1936 and looks exactly as it would have during the Great Terror.

Mikhail Efimovich Koltsov (at right) talks to Republican Spanish officials during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). As a *Pravda* correspondent, he travelled to Spain to cover the conflict, while at the same time working for the NKVD. He also acted as military advisor to Loyalist forces. In November 1937, Koltsov was summoned from Spain and arrested on charges of anti-Soviet and terrorist activities in December 1938. He was sentenced to death and shot on 2 February 1940. (Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

The Great Terror was the greatest peacetime convulsion in the history of the USSR, averaging approximately 1,000 executions per day for roughly

two years – a total of about 700,000 executions – and about 1.4 million arrests. In 1938 alone, over 1,000,000 prisoners were transported by NKVD convoy guards/escort troops and victims of Polish heritage alone numbered close to 150,000 persons. The Great Terror may also be thought of as the transition from Marxism–Leninism, a system of authoritarian collective leadership enforced by state terror, to Stalinism, a despotic personal autocracy in which subordinates were expected to obey without question and never knew – in Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev's words – whether the end of the day would find them in their office, or in a cell in the Lubyanka.

The NKVD and foreign intelligence

Soviet foreign intelligence derived in large part from NKVD agents of the INO – from February 1941 the INU (*Inostrannoye Upravleniye*; 'Foreign Intelligence Directorate') – but also with major contributions from the Fourth Main Directorate – from February 1942 the GRU (*Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye*; 'Main Intelligence Directorate') – and the NKID (*Naródnyi Komissariát Inostrannykh Del*; 'People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs') including diplomats and other employees of embassies, and from journalists, trade representatives and others. To Stalin's way of thinking, nowhere was the threat of treason greater than from Soviet citizens who were stationed abroad. Exposed as they were to the decadence of the West and Western propaganda, living among, working and conversing with imperialists, it seemed obvious to Stalin that here was a group from which hidden enemies could be recruited.

Truly, nowhere is the perceived nexus between external and internal threats more evident than in the treatment of Stalin's intelligence apparat during the Great Terror. These groups suffered very high losses with a resultant loss in efficiency due to lack of experienced personnel. In the INO's Moscow office alone, there were about 100 arrests in 1937–38. Twelve *rezidenti* (NKVD station chiefs) were among them; the Berlin *rezidentura* was eliminated almost to the man. The Fourth Main Directorate was equally affected or worse, with the USSR's military attachés to virtually every major World War II belligerent country recalled and executed.

By 1940, Soviet intelligence had been reconstituted with about 2,000 new sources, although the loss of highly experienced and sophisticated polyglots with worldly experience of the West could never be made good.

Significant mistakes in tradecraft were made as a result including intermingling agent networks, meetings with sources likely to be under police surveillance without taking adequate precautions, even meeting sources within their own homes. This led to losses of agents and sources that could have been avoided. Foreign agents returning home found they had no one to report to, no experts who understood the countries they worked in or spoke the languages of their assigned countries. Despite this, however, Soviet intelligence had ample warning of Operation *Barbarossa*, the impending German invasion of the USSR scheduled to begin on 22 June 1941. The intelligence failure was one of coordination, analysis and the failure to make a compelling case to Stalin. After the experience of 1937–38, it would take a brave (or suicidal) Intelligence officer to tell Stalin what he did not want to hear.

The 7.62mm SVT-38 semi-automatic rifle was issued in time to be used in the Winter War against Finland. The Soviet forces found the rifle heavy and difficult to use, resulting in a redesign to the SVT-40, which unlike the SVT-38 was equipped for a bayonet. The rifle shown here is an SVT-38 manufactured in 1939 at the Tula Arsenal.

From the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact to Operation *Barbarossa*

On 23 August 1939, Germany and the USSR signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, seemingly just a non-aggression pact; but there were secret protocols allowing the USSR to reconstitute the former Russian Empire by annexing the Baltic States and parts of Romania and Finland. As part of these protocols, the USSR invaded eastern Poland on 17 September 1939, thus entering World War II as a co-belligerent of Germany. While NKVD troops did not see combat against Polish forces, it was the organization's role to clear and pacify elements inside Poland that were seen to be hostile to the USSR. The most notorious of these actions was the Katyn forest massacre, which took place in multiple locations during April and May 1940. The NKVD executed all captured Polish officers – approximately 22,000 in number – and 'Sovietized' the USSR's portion of occupied Poland by killing or deporting likely opponents of Soviet power such as members of the intelligentsia, landowners and priests. The USSR

did not accept responsibility for these actions until 13 April 1990, exactly 47 years after the discovery of the mass graves.

The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact shocked the world given the ideological animosity between the two countries and many communists outside the USSR criticized Stalin, but to his thinking the pact was a great success. Stalin had feared a diplomatic accommodation between Britain, France and Nazi Germany that would leave Hitler unfettered to attack the USSR without the madness of a two-front war. By signing the pact and invading Poland, Germany now came into conflict with France and Britain in what was expected to be a long Imperialist war similar to World War I. Not only would the USSR have time to prepare itself for war, but in the conditions of an expected protracted conflict, the material conditions for revolution in the West might eventuate, as had happened in Russia during World War I. The problem for Stalin, though, was that Germany defeated France in just six weeks.

Fearing that Finland could be transited for military purposes by Germany, Stalin demanded a land exchange with Finland in an attempt to provide a security buffer around Leningrad and in the Petsamo region in the far north to increase security for the Soviet naval base at Murmansk. The Finns refused and the USSR invaded Finland on 30 November 1939, thus starting the Winter War (1939–40). Despite having the advantage of greatly superior numbers, the Soviets' initial battle plan was weak and the Finns were initially successful due to superior generalship, planning and tactics. The Soviets regrouped under Marshal of the USSR Semyon Konstantinovich Timoshenko and used massive force to compel the Finns to sue for peace. Finland lost 11 per cent of its territory and over 400,000 Finns – 12 per cent of Finland's population – fled from the Karelian Isthmus, the Finnish province bordering Leningrad, thus obviating the need for the NKVD to 'Sovietize' this area. Of 5,486 Soviets taken prisoner by the Finns, most were sent to the GULAG once they returned to the USSR.

In July 1940, even as the world still expected a German invasion of Britain, there were substantial military build-ups in German-occupied Poland involving large troop redeployments and construction of supporting military infrastructure such as barracks, fuel dumps, airfields and supply depots. The NKVD became aware of attempts to contact and recruit dissidents within the USSR from sources within the German embassy in Moscow. By November, when plans to invade Britain were shelved, the

majority of the German Army was positioned on the German–Soviet border. In early December, Vladimir Georgievich Dekanozov, the Soviet ambassador to Berlin, was the recipient of an anonymous letter citing the observed troop build-ups and warning of German intentions to attack the USSR. In fact, Hitler signed the directive authorizing Operation *Barbarossa* on 18 December 1940, a fact that became known to Soviet Intelligence within a fortnight. Corroboration came from a number of sources, including from a German Army officer to the Soviet military attaché in Romania, and from Vilhelm Assarasson, the Swedish ambassador to Moscow, who had a source in Berlin.

Although this same information was corroborated in an intercepted Turkish dispatch, it was disbelieved because it had been relayed through Sir Stafford Cripps, the British ambassador to Moscow. In fact, it is impossible to overstate how strongly Stalin believed that the British stood behind the whole Imperialist order. While this belief was misguided, Stalin was aware that elements of the British ruling class favoured an accommodation with Hitler, as amply reported by NKVD operatives. Specific information cabled by Cripps to the British Foreign Office on 24 March 1941, including specifics of Operation *Barbarossa* identifying the three main axes of attack, was assessed as false by Britain's own Joint Intelligence Committee – a fact duly reported to Stalin by high NKVD sources within the British Foreign Office and MI6. Moreover, Britain and the Commonwealth, standing alone against Germany, stood to benefit greatly from hostilities between the USSR and Germany. The strange flight of Rudolf Hess to Scotland on 10 May 1941 further heightened Stalin's suspicion of Britain, fearing a possible deal between Nazi Germany and Britain to combine their forces against the USSR. Consequently, Stalin was highly suspicious that the copious warnings of impending war were a British disinformation campaign intended to cause him to increase his defensive posture, possibly to mobilize his troops, and thereby provoke a war with Germany that otherwise could be avoided. Stalin was so concerned about provocation that he ordered the NKVD and Fourth Main Directorate to break contact with his extremely valuable contacts in Germany known as the 'Red Orchestra', effectively blinding himself deliberately for a period of time, although contact was later re-established in time for accurate war warnings to be received.

White summer service tunic for a major of the NKVD Frontier Troops, *c*.1940. Note the two bars for the rank and the matching cuff insignia. White summer service tunics were common before the Great Patriotic War, but they were not made in huge numbers after the war began.

The *budenovka* cap became famous during the Russian Civil War (1917–22), but it had outlived its usefulness by the time World War II began. The last major use of the *budenovka* was in the Winter War (1939–40). This example is a standard Red Army style, but has been issued to the NKVD Frontier Troops; note the green star that denotes the Border Guards.

In addition to the Red Orchestra, other information streams corroborated intelligence on Operation *Barbarossa*, including from the Fourth Main Directorate's 'Lucy' ring in Switzerland and Richard Sorge, the Directorate's agent in Tokyo. In many cases these warnings contained specific information and dates: between September 1940 and June 1941, the Red Orchestra alone submitted over 40 accurate reports about German intentions including specific corroboration with supportive data. A telegram from the Italian ambassador to Berlin, intercepted on 20 June 1941, stated the start date for Operation *Barbarossa* to be between 20 and 25 June. Additionally, large German troop, tank and aircraft build-ups were directly observed, cross-border overflights and ground reconnaissance operations were carried out, defectors with warnings swam the River Bug, the German embassy in Moscow began to transfer non-essential personnel from the country, German-flagged vessels left Baltic ports and smoke was observed from German government facilities as staff burned their secret papers. So the tactical surprise achieved by the Germans was not due to lack of warnings, but rather from specific disbelief in their veracity.

There was significant conflicting information, as is always the case in intelligence work. Before Hitler shelved plans for the invasion of Britain, SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich's Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service) indicated the troops in the East were training for cross-Channel

operations. Counting on the efficiency and ubiquity of Soviet Intelligence, the Germans spread disinformation by issuing false orders and directives, distributing detailed military maps of Britain, and ostentatiously supplying English translators to German Army units in the area. Once it was clear that the cross-Channel invasion had been cancelled, German intelligence dropped broad hints that the troop build-up presaged a Balkans strategy to attack British holdings in the Mediterranean, a prospect that was seemingly corroborated by the Italian invasion of Greece on 13 November and Romania joining the Tripartite Pact on 23 November, as well as the following year's German involvement in Yugoslavia and Greece. In addition to Mussolini, there was support for the Balkans strategy in some elements of the Wehrmacht, notably the German Navy and Minister for Foreign Affairs Joachim von Ribbentrop, further lending it credence. The Balkans, particularly the egress from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, had long been an Imperial Russian obsession, lending further power to this disinformation.

Also, Germany's known need for raw materials allowed Hitler's security services to spread disinformation that the massive troop build-ups on the German–Soviet frontier were a giant hoax to blackmail the Soviets into accepting revisions to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in order to deliver greater raw materials and territorial concessions to Germany. Stalin himself believed a renegotiation of the pact was possible to buy time to allow for war preparations.

Finally, many in the Wehrmacht thought invasion of the USSR before defeating Britain, thus starting a two-front war, was ill-advised if not suicidal. This highly rational belief was held not only by some in the German military but also by Stalin himself; it was part of the reason why the British Joint Intelligence Committee rejected Cripps' March 1941 war warning. The JIC also believed Germany's aggressive posture to be part of a giant blackmail scheme. German disinformation confirmed Stalin's preconceptions that war could be avoided in 1941 and in the end, that was the decisive factor.

The NKVD in the Great Patriotic War

With the start of Operation *Barbarossa*, the Axis invasion of the USSR, on 22 June 1941, the NKVD was tasked less with combat and more with securing state secrets and preventing the release of disloyal elements then in

Soviet prisons who were in danger of falling into the hands of the advancing enemy forces. While the initial plan was to move these prisoners deeper inside the USSR, what actually took place were known as the NKVD prisoner massacres. Most of those who were killed were held in prisons in eastern Poland and the Baltic States. The estimate of the total number murdered without trial is as high as 100,000.

The first of the USSR's troops to see combat in the opening hours of Operation *Barbarossa* were the Frontier Troops of the NKVD, otherwise known as the Border Guards. Manning the frontier posts and fortresses, these troops were the USSR's first line of defence; but lacking armour and artillery, these lightly armed troops were quickly overrun for the most part, though some units were able to hold out against the overwhelming strength of the German forces. The most famous defensive action occurred at Brest, located in what had been Poland, but which was now the Belorussian SSR. The 19th-century Brest fortress was defended by a mix of Red Army and NKVD Frontier Troops, as well as a small contingent of NKVD Transport Troops. The Germans intended to cross the Bug River and capture the city of Brest and the fortress within the first 24 hours of the invasion, but found the fortress to be well defended. A week of fierce fighting ensued before the Germans were able to capture the by now almost completely destroyed fortress. The NKVD's 17th Frontier Guards Detachment fought almost to the last man, thereby demonstrating the fighting abilities of the NKVD forces.

NKVD Frontier Troops mounted a fierce resistance to the Axis invaders in such locations as the Brest fortress, commemorated in many paintings. The struggle for the fortress took place during the first week of fighting after the 22 June 1941 invasion, and became a major element of post-war commemoration in the USSR. (Nik Cornish at **www.stavka.org.uk**)

This M1936 helmet was found by the author on the Stalingrad battlefield in the 1990s. While these helmets were gradually replaced by the much simpler M1939 and M1940 helmets, they were still in use with certain units during the middle of the Great Patriotic War.

While the NKVD Frontier Troops saw action during the first hours of the war, it was not until later that the NKVD Internal Troops engaged in direct combat with the Germans. There were only 15 divisions of NKVD Internal Troops in June 1941; most were tasked with rear-area security and provided blocking detachments to prevent unauthorized Red Army retreats. As the war progressed and the need for more front-line troops became apparent, the NKVD Internal Troops started to form more divisions. Border Guard units (usually from the East Asia and Central Asia) were converted into regular NKVD troops as were NKVD Police units. These were often supplemented with local recruits and members of the Komsomol youth groups. The numbers grew, especially later in the war, to the point that 10 per cent of the USSR's fighting forces were NKVD Internal Troops. Some NKVD divisions were also then converted into regular divisions of the Red Army. While always under NKVD command, in battle the NKVD Internal Troops would take orders from the army group to which they were assigned.

E STALINGRAD, SEPTEMBER 1942

Stalingrad, 13 September 1942: a prone NKVD machine-gunner provides cover fire for four NKVD men as they mount a counter-attack as part of the 10th NKVD Internal Troops Rifle Division’s effort to defend the Voroshilov district against strong German attacks on the centre of the city.

(1) *Kapitan*, NKVD Internal Troops
Armed with a 7.62mm Tokarev semi-automatic pistol, this NKVD captain wears the M1940 pullover for NKVD officers; it was identical to that used by the Red Army, though with the rank insignia of the Internal Troops. The two bars on his collar tabs represents his rank. His standard officer's 'Sam Browne' belt carries only the holster for his pistol. His blue visor cap with red piping and band was the most distinctive element of the NKVD uniform, the colours and design not varying from the lowest enlisted man up to the most senior colonel.

(2) *Serzhant*, NKVD Internal Troops
Directly behind the leader of the attack is the NCO flag-bearer carrying the regiment's 1940-style unit banner. The reverse is shown, bearing the words 'From the Supreme Soviet USSR'. The obverse of this pattern of flag bore the wording 'Workers of the World Unite!' above a globe surrounded by a wreath. The regimental designation was displayed beneath the globe. Flags of this pattern were used until 1943, when a simpler-to-produce design was introduced for the Red Army and NKVD. This sergeant wears a Red Army M1940 *shapka-ushanka*, an M1940 pullover of coarser material than that worn by his captain, and a standard Red Army enlisted man's belt. His breeches are in the unpiped field style and are worn with a pair of Red Army enlisted man's boots.

(3) Enlisted man, NKVD Internal Troops
Armed with a 7.62mm Mosin-Nagant rifle, this NKVD man is dressed in a similar uniform to that of the NCO but wears his NKVD peaked cap.

(4) Enlisted man, NKVD Internal Troops
Bringing up the rear is an NKVD soldier wearing an SSh-36 helmet and the 'steel bib' body armour. This style of armour was effective against small pistol rounds, shrapnel and bayonet attacks and was thus very popular for urban combat. It was often worn by combat engineers fighting in built-up areas; for field use, where the combat engineer often had to crawl, such armour was less effective. He carries the 7.62mm PPSh-41

submachine gun, commonly issued to NKVD Internal Troops and an excellent weapon for close-quarter fighting.

(5) Enlisted man, NKVD Internal Troops

Providing covering fire with his 7.62mm Degtyaryov DP-27 light machine gun, this member of the NKVD Internal Troops wears a blue padded *telogreika* jacket. When fighting against the Finns in 1939–40 the Red Army found that it lacked an adequate heavy winter jacket that was less cumbersome than the issue greatcoat. Observing the Finns wearing quilted padded jackets, the Soviet made their own versions in huge numbers; the *telogreika* jacket was issued in field drab for the Red Army and in blue for troops of the NKVD. Unlike the NKVD soldier to the rear who is using the outdated – but still used – SSh-36 helmet, this soldier wears the improved SSh-40 helmet, which was simpler to produce than the SSh-36 and by far the most commonly used helmet in all branches of the Soviet armed forces during World War II.

The NKVD played a major role in overseeing the partisan forces, both to ensure they attacked German forces and more importantly that they did not take an anti-Soviet turn. Here, members of the ‘Winners’ partisan unit cross a river in 1942–43. The ‘Winners’ were one of several NKVD partisan units flown into occupied territory. They were led by Commander Dmitry Nikolaevich Medvedev. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)

The most famous battle in which NKVD Internal Troops played a part was Stalingrad (August 1942–February 1943), in which the 10th NKVD Internal Troops Rifle Division played a significant role. Fielding a mix of former Frontier Troops, local police from Stalingrad, and members of the Stalingrad Komsomol, the division was successful in defending the city from the earliest German attacks until the arrival of the 62nd Army. While defending the south and western parts of the city the division saw some of the heaviest fighting of the battle. By the time the division was withdrawn in October 1942 it had been reduced to just over 200 men. In honour of the division's service it was awarded the highest state award, the Order of Lenin, and was renamed the 10th 'Stalingrad' Order of Lenin NKVD Internal Troops Rifle Division.

An NKVD blocking detachment in action. These units were responsible for motivating Red Army troops to move forward in the face of daunting, even impossible odds. (Courtesy of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow via Stavka)

M1943 service tunic for a major-general of NKVD Internal Troops. This tunic is identical to those worn by Red Army generals except for the piping, here being royal blue for the NKVD. Generals of NKVD troops did not have the special ‘wave’ on the shoulder boards like those found on the shoulder boards of NKGB commissars.

While some units of the NKVD participated in battle, most of the Internal Troops were used for rear-area security, sabotage, and the deportations of ethnic groups such the Crimean Tatars, who were seen as disloyal. Under Stalin’s ‘Not One Step Back’ orders that punished units that retreated without permission, the NKVD was tasked with setting up blocking units that would fire on their own troops as they withdrew.

NKVD DIVISIONS 1941–45

The NKVD formed a large number of divisions to add to the single 'Motor Rifle' division, nine 'Railroad Security' divisions, single 'Special Installation Security' division and pair of 'Convoy Forces Security' divisions in existence before 22 June 1941. Two new types of NKVD division – the 'Mountain Rifle' division and the 'Special Installation and Railroad Security' division – meant that there were seven different types of division fielded by the NKVD at different times during the Great Patriotic War. An initial effort to keep all of the various types of NKVD divisions in one numerical sequence gave way to a confusing plethora of different number sequences based on divisional function, meaning that there could be as many as three NKVD divisions bearing the same number at different times. There were multiple divisions bearing territorial designations instead of a number at various times. Moreover, the exigencies of wartime meant that NKVD divisions frequently moved to the Red Army. The table below lists the divisions in the sequence in which they were formed; where known, the fate of the division is listed.

Divisional title	Formed	Remarks
1st NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Jun-38	Still exists at the time of writing
2nd NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-39	Renumbered 23rd, Feb-42; disbanded May-51
3rd NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-39	Renumbered 24th, Feb-42; disbanded Dec-46
4th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-39	Renumbered 25th, Feb-42; disbanded May-51
5th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-39	Renumbered 26th, Feb-42; disbanded Dec-46
6th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-39	Renumbered 27th, Feb-42; disbanded May-51
7th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-39	Renumbered 28th, Feb-42; became the 32nd NKVD Railroad Security Brigade, Feb-44
8th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-39	Renumbered 29th, Feb-42; disbanded Dec-46
9th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-39	Disbanded Sep-41
10th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Nov-39	Disbanded Oct-41
11th NKVD Special Installation Security Division	Nov-39	Merged with 12th to become 15th, Jan-42; 15th disbanded May-51
13th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Nov-39	Renumbered 35th, Feb-42
14th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Sep-40	Renumbered 36th, Feb-42
12th NKVD Mountain Rifle Division	Jun-41	Transferred to Red Army, Jul-41
15th NKVD Mountain Rifle Division	Jun-41	Transferred to Red Army, Jul-42
16th NKVD Mountain Rifle Division	Jun-41	Transferred to Red Army, Jul-42
18th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Jun-41	Renumbered 30th, Feb-42; disbanded Dec-46
19th NKVD Special Installation and Railroad Security Division	Jun-41	Became 31st Railroad Security Division, Mar-42; disbanded May-46
20th NKVD Special Installation and Railroad Security Division	Jun-41	Became 20th NKVD Rifle Division, Sep-41
21st NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Jun-41	Became 21st NKVD Rifle Division, Sep-41; transferred to Red Army, Aug-42
22nd NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Jun-41	Disbanded Jan-42
23rd NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Jun-41	Renumbered 8th, Jan-42; renumbered 13th, May-42; transferred to Red Army, Aug-42
25th NKVD Special Installation Security Division	Jun-41	Renumbered 18th, Jan-42; disbanded May-51
26th NKVD Mountain Rifle Division	Jun-41	Transferred to Red Army, Jul-41
2nd NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Jul-41	Disbanded Oct-45
12th NKVD Special Installation Security Division	Aug-41	Merged with 11th to become 15th, Jan-42; 15th disbanded May-51
1st NKVD Rifle Division	Sep-41	Transferred to Red Army, Aug-42
20th NKVD Rifle Division	Sep-41	Transferred to Red Army, Aug-42
6th NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Nov-41	Renumbered 8th, Jan-42; transferred to Red Army, Jul-42
11th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-42	Disbanded Dec-42
12th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-42	Converted to 22nd NKVD Rifle Brigade, Sep-42
16th NKVD Special Installation Security Division	Jan-42	Disbanded May-50
17th NKVD Special Installation Security Division	Jan-42	Disbanded May-51
19th NKVD Special Installation Security Division	Jan-42	Became 8th NKVD Brigade, Nov-42
3rd NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-42	Disbanded Aug-42
4th NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Jan-42	Disbanded Aug-42
5th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-42	Disbanded Sep-51

6th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-42	Disbanded Oct-45
9th NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Jan-42	Transferred to Red Army, Aug-42
35th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Feb-42	Disbanded Jul-51
36th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Feb-42	Disbanded Jan-48
32nd NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-42	Disbanded May-51
33rd NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-42	Disbanded Jan-47
34th NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-42	Disbanded Dec-46
37th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Mar-42	Disbanded Jul-51
38th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Mar-42	Disbanded Jul-51
41st NKVD Railroad Security Division	Mar-42	Became the 10th NKVD Rifle Division, Jul-42; transferred to Red Army, Oct-42
7th NKVD Motor Rifle Division	Apr-42	Disbanded Sep-51
19th NKVD Rifle Division	Aug-42	
Grozny NKVD Rifle Division	Aug-42	Disbanded Apr-44
Makhachkala NKVD Rifle Division	Aug-42	Disbanded Jan-43
Ordzhonikidze NKVD Rifle Division	Aug-42	Renumbered 9th, May-44; disbanded Oct-44
Central Asian NKVD Rifle Division	Oct-42	Transferred to Red Army, Jan-43
Far Eastern NKVD Rifle Division	Oct-42	Transferred to Red Army, Jan-43
Siberian NKVD Rifle Division	Oct-42	Transferred to Red Army, Jan-43
Trans-Baikal NKVD Rifle Division	Oct-42	Transferred to Red Army, Jan-43
Ural NKVD Rifle Division	Oct-42	Transferred to Red Army, Jan-43
20th NKVD Special Installation Security Division	Nov-42	Disbanded May-51
21st NKVD Special Installation Security Division	Jul-43	Became 54th NKVD Brigade, Nov-45
39th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Aug-43	Disbanded Jul-51
4th NKVD Rifle Division	Oct-43	Disbanded Aug-51
22nd NKVD Railroad Security Division	Feb-44	Disbanded May-46
14th NKVD Railway Facilities Protection Division	Aug-44	Disbanded May-51
45th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Aug-44	
46th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	Aug-44	
64th NKVD Rifle Division	Oct-44	Disbanded Jun-48
62nd NKVD Rifle Division	Dec-44	Disbanded Sep-51
57th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-45	Disbanded Oct-45
58th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-45	Disbanded Jun-45
59th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-45	Disbanded Oct-45
63rd NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-45	Disbanded Dec-46
65th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-45	Disbanded Jul-46
66th NKVD Rifle Division	Jan-45	Disbanded Oct-45
60th NKVD Rifle Division	Feb-45	Disbanded Oct-46
61st NKVD Rifle Division	Feb-45	Disbanded Dec-45
47th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	May-45	
48th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	May-45	
49th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	May-45	
50th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	May-45	
51st NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	May-45	
52nd NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	May-45	
53rd NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	May-45	
56th NKVD Convoy Forces Security Division	May-45	

NKVD officers observing manoeuvres in recently occupied eastern Poland, 1939. During the Great Patriotic War, NKVD Frontier Troops moved along the entire front as the Soviet border itself changed with the fighting. (From the fonds of the RGAKFD in Krasnogorsk via Stavka)

The anti-German partisan movement behind enemy lines was an important theatre of war for the USSR. Many retreating Border Guards had taken refuge in the forests along with survivors of Red Army units and civilians to create partisan brigades. While Stalin and Beria allowed these groups to exist, they were to be kept under the strictest control. The NKVD was often tasked with despatching agents to take over leadership of these units. Not all partisan units were friendly to the USSR, however, and the NKVD was tasked with rooting out and destroying nationalist bands that wanted independence from the Soviet Union. The most prominent of these was the UPA (*Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya*; Ukrainian Insurgent Army). Founded in 1942, its aim was the removal of the Germans and Russians from Ukrainian territory. While notionally anti-German, the UPA often cooperated with German forces, and was able to wipe out a battalion of NKVD troops in Galicia in western Ukraine during 1944. NKVD forces would at times dress as the partisans and intentionally kill civilians with the goal of discrediting the UPA. With the withdrawal of German forces, UPA personnel were hunted down by the NKVD and Soviet security agencies, with fighting continuing until at least 1947; some sources assert that the UPA was still active as late as the mid-1950s. As well as the UPA, anti-

Soviet partisan groups such as the Forest Brotherhood were also active in the Baltic States.

F ANTI-PARTISAN OPERATIONS, UKRAINE, MARCH 1945

Pictured in western Ukraine in March 1945, these NKVD Frontier Troops are involved in mopping-up operations mounted against the Ukrainian Nationalist partisans. Deep in the woodlands they have killed one partisan and captured another. **(1) *Mayor*, NKVD**

Commanding this mission is an NKVD major wearing the M1943 service uniform, the single star on his shoulder boards denoting his rank. He examines the captured partisan's MP 34 submachine gun, chambering 9×19mm Luger Parabellum ammunition.

(2) Junior officer, NKVD Frontier Troops

Behind the major is his deputy for this mission, a junior lieutenant of the NKVD Frontier Troops. He has been awarded the Order of the Red Star (**3**) for single-handedly capturing three partisans. Established in April 1930, the Order of the Red Star (*Orden Krasnoy Zvezdy*) was awarded in recognition of a variety of services to the USSR, notably for personal valour and effective battlefield leadership. The award is affixed to the right breast of his M1943 service pullover tunic. He carries the PPS-43 submachine gun, chambering 7.62×25mm Tokarev ammunition; it was commonly used by the Soviet security services.

(4) Private, NKVD Frontier Troops

Guarding the lieutenant is a private of the NKVD Frontier Troops, who is wearing an M1943 greatcoat. He carries the rare Thompson M1922 submachine gun. Supplied to the USSR under Lend-Lease, the Thompson was not popular due to its .45 ACP cartridge size and tendency to freeze up in the Russian winter. These weapons were normally issued to tank crews, naval infantry, or rear-echelon troops.

(5) Ukrainian partisan

The captured partisan kneels on the ground, having dropped the clips to his 9mm MP 34 submachine gun, along with a *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth) knife that he has taken from a captured German soldier. He wears a German belt with ammunition pouches.

Inspired by the Finnish 9mm Suomi KP/-31 submachine gun with its 71-round drum magazine, Georgi Semyonovich Shpagin’s 7.62mm PPSh-41 was a rugged design made inexpensively from sheet-metal stampings. By spring 1942 almost 100,000 units were being produced monthly. The example shown here was manufactured in 1943.

Dating from 1944, this ‘special’ NKGB commissars’ tunic was used by the high command of Soviet Intelligence. This very rare tunic was used for only a short time near the end of the Great Patriotic War; its resemblance to the uniform of the hated SS was duly noted by the high command of the Red Army. In 1945, commissars of the NKGB were finally given the rank of general, but had to adopt the uniforms of the Red Army and thus discard this unusual uniform item.

The 1944 special commissars' tunic being worn by a commissar general 4th rank, the equivalent of a major-general in the Red Army.

AFTERMATH

When the Soviet government was established in late 1917, Lenin wished to distinguish his invention from other governments and so the term ‘People’s Commissariats’ was used in place of former Tsarist ministries and ‘ministers’ became known as ‘People’s Commissars’. Other trappings of the bourgeoisie such as rank insignia or even titles in the military were eschewed as well. During World War II, however, it became useful for propaganda purposes to remind the populace of the glorious imperial past and to reawaken the spirit of Russian patriotism. To this end, military attire began to look more like Tsarist uniforms, rank insignia became more elaborate and shoulder boards were reintroduced. Military orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov were established to invoke the past and the war itself was called the ‘Great Patriotic War’ to evoke the ‘Patriotic War’: the defeat of Napoleon.

In October 1946, the nomenclature of ‘People’s Commissars’ and ‘People’s Commissariats’ reverted to ‘Ministers’ and ‘Ministries’. Beria’s NKVD now became the MVD (*Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del*; ‘Ministry of Internal Affairs’), and the NKGB became the MGB (*Ministerstvo gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti*; ‘Ministry of State Security’). The MGB continued to be divided into Main or Chief Directorates. The First Main Directorate remained in charge of foreign intelligence; the Second Main Directorate handled domestic counter-intelligence and security; SMERSH ceased to exist, its functions absorbed into the Third Main Directorate; and the Fifth Main Directorate was responsible for monitoring dissent both within the Party and in Soviet society in general, formerly responsibilities of the Secret Political Department. Lesser directorates were responsible for guarding political leaders, for technology, for signals intelligence and for administration and the economy.

G BERLIN, APRIL 1945

At the entrance to Adolf Hitler’s bunker in Berlin, Commissar of State Security 2nd rank Viktor Semyonovich Abakumov stands over the trench where Hitler’s body was found by Red Army troops. Stalin was obsessed with verifying the details of Hitler’s

fate, and sent many NKVD and NKGB officers to unearth evidence of the *Führer*'s suicide.

(1) *Komissar gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti 2-go ranga*, NKGB

As Beria's deputy and head of Counter-Intelligence (SMERSH), Abakumov was feared by many both inside and outside the USSR. Enjoying direct access to Stalin, Abakumov was even able to bypass Beria on occasion. After the Great Patriotic War he was made head of the MGB, the successor to the NKGB, but was arrested and executed on 19 December 1954. Abakumov wears the special 1944 service uniform only issued to commissars (generals) of the NKGB. The uniform has a marked resemblance to those worn by the notorious German SS, with rumours circulating that it was based on the German design. It consisted of the grey single-breasted royal-blue-piped tunic with the special NKGB commissar 'stripe' shoulder boards, blue-piped grey trousers and grey cap. NKGB commissars were finally given full Red Army general's rank in the summer of 1945, with one of the conditions being that they had to give up this special uniform.

(2) *Komissar gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti 4-go ranga*, NKGB

To Abakumov's left is a commissar general 4th rank (major-general), who wears the M1943 general officer's pullover service tunic. Unpiped, it is identical to that of generals in the Red Army. On his left breast he has the NKVD Distinguished Service badge, known as the 'egg' (**3**). He wears typical NKVD-NKGB commissar's breeches, an M1940 Red Army general's belt, and the blue-and-red NKVD-NKGB general's visor cap.

(4) *Polkovnik*, NKVD Frontier Troops

The colonel to Abakumov's right has been permitted to come to the bunker to take photos with his recently acquired German Leica Standard camera. He wears the standard M1943 summer pullover uniform used by the NKVD and Red Army. His branch is denoted by the green piping on his shoulder boards and his rank is denoted by three large stars on two green stripes. The hat is unpiped and could be used by personnel of any branch of

the armed forces. His breeches are also the same as those worn by Red Army officers, but with green piping. His belt is a standard M1940 Red Army officer's belt. NKVD Border Troops often served as a sort of military police force and moved with the Red Army as the front line shifted.

Officer Zavgorodiny's Distinguished Service badge, known as 'the Egg', was awarded in 1943. Here it is displayed in its original issue box; the award book lists the serial number, 01476. Note that at the bottom would have been the signature of Beria as head of the NKVD at the time. After Beria's arrest and execution on 23 December 1953, however, it was not beneficial to have any association with him, prompting this officer to cover up with ink the signature of his former boss.

Whatever name was used, the Soviet security services investigated the cases of Soviet POWs held by the Germans and liberated at war's end – but maltreatment began much earlier and was consistent with policy during the Winter War between the USSR and Finland in which all 5,486 Soviet

POWs of the Finns were imprisoned after repatriation. On 28 June 1941, six days after the beginning of Operation *Barbarossa*, Order 00246 had extended criminal liability to the families of traitors in a further attempt to discourage battlefield surrenders. Even Red Army men who were captured and escaped, or those who fought their way out of encirclement without capture were suspected and either shot, imprisoned or forced into punishment battalions that were given suicidal battlefield assignments. Of the 4.8 million Soviet civilians deported to Germany for forced labour, a high percentage of the survivors were imprisoned in the GULAG penal system. Even civilians living behind the lines in Soviet territory were suspect once liberated and could be arrested or imprisoned. In the summer of 1945, the USSR had 43 special camps for imprisoning POWs and repatriates and 26 screening facilities in addition to 96 other such facilities in Germany and other Eastern European countries. Attention was also focused on other armed groups such as Poland's Home Army, the Ukrainian UPA and the Forest Brotherhood group from the Baltic States.

H VICTORY PARADE, 24 JUNE 1945

Red Square, Moscow: three NKVD leaders, including Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria, meet to discuss further plans after the Victory Parade.
(1) *Komissar gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti 3-go ranga*, NKGB

This officer wears the M1943 parade uniform for the commanders of state security, the NKGB, with the rank of Commissar of State Security 3rd Rank. Only the senior commanders of the NKGB had the special blue stripes on the rank shoulder boards.

(2) *General-leytenant*, NKVD

To his left is a lieutenant-general of NKVD troops, which made up approximately 10 per cent of the fighting forces of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War. He wears the M1943 parade uniform, which would be the model for the Red Army's M1945 'Victory Parade' uniforms introduced for this very parade. Note the special cuff embroidery that was unique to the NKVD/NKGB flag ranks. He carries the M1940 general's parade sabre.

(3) Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria

On the far end stands their leader, who has already changed into his M1943 service uniform. The design of his shoulder boards (**4**) is unique as he was the only holder of the rank of *General'nyy komissar gosbezopasnosti* (Commissar General of State Security).

M1943 parade tunic for a lieutenant-general of NKVD troops. These NKVD generals' tunics served as a model for the eventual M1945 Red Army 'Victory Parade' generals' uniforms. While the cut of the tunic and the collar embroidery would remain the same, only NKVD generals had the special cuff insignia as shown here.

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Polish identity documents and other items retrieved at Katyn following the German discovery of the mass grave there in 1943. (ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

Beria in 1945. He wears his M1943 service tunic with unique rank boards, his service ribbons and his Hero of Socialist Labour award. Beria resigned as NKVD chief in December 1945. His successor, Sergei Nikiforovich Kruglov, became the head of the MVD and formed an alliance with Viktor Semyonovich Abakumov, his opposite number at the MGB; both men were promoted by Stalin to curb Beria's influence. Following Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, there was a power struggle at the highest levels of the USSR's ruling clique. After strenuous but unsuccessful efforts to stay in power in the wake of Stalin's death, Beria was arrested – along with several of his protégés, including Vsevolod Nikolayevich Merkulov – and executed on 23 December 1953. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

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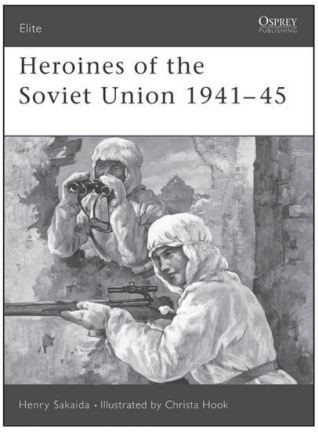

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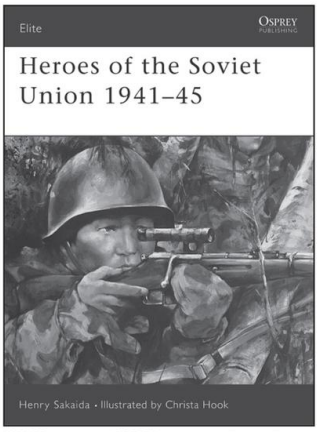

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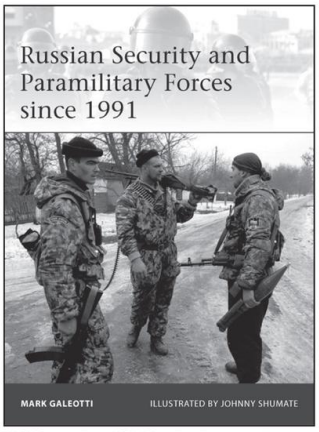

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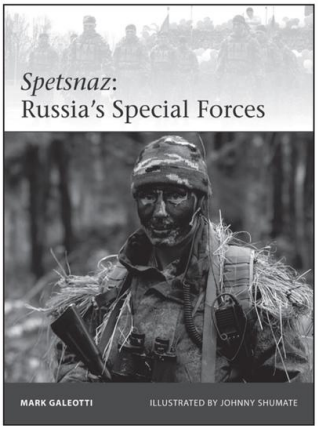

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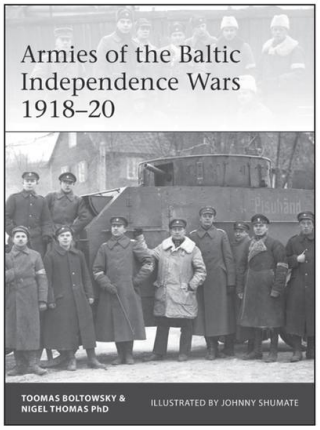

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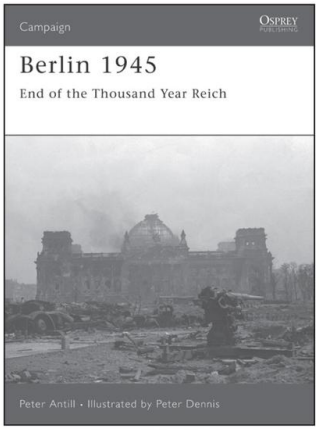

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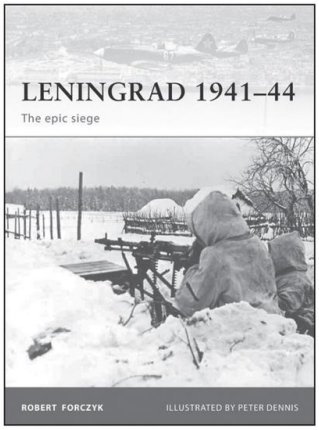

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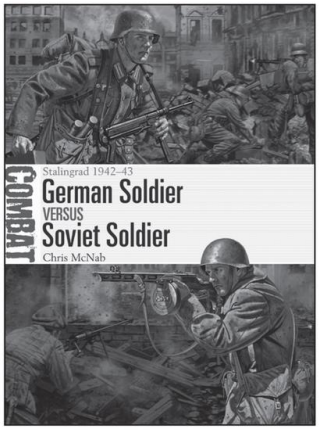

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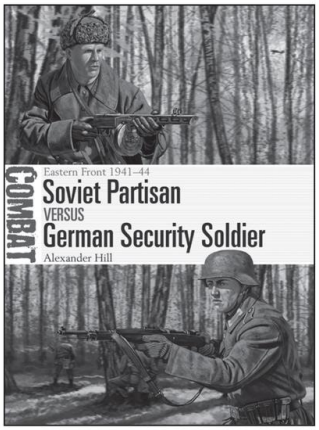

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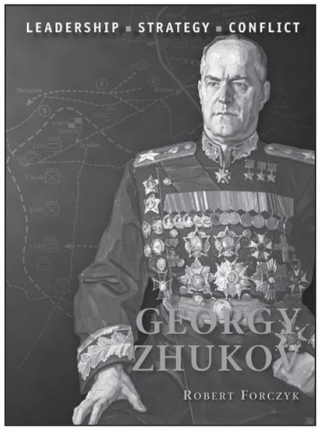

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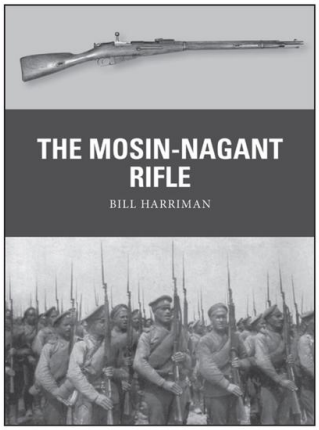

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Authors' note

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Editor's note

Unless otherwise noted all photographs in this book are from the collection of Douglas Drabik.

Front cover, above: NKVD troops sing on parade. (Nik Cornish at **www.stavka.org.uk**)

Title-page photograph: In this German propaganda poster from Ukraine, *c*.1942, NKVD officers stand over the bloodied corpses of their prisoners. (Galerie Bilderwelt/Getty Images)